

秤猿鬼 *Yanki Shikari*
ill. KEG

骸骨騎士

VI

*Skeleton Knight,
going out to
the parallel universe*

士様

只今
異世界
お出掛け
中

Skeleton Knight
vol.06: The Crisis of The Kingdom

by Hakari Enki

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秤猿鬼 K&G
骸骨騎士様 VI
只今 異世界へお出掛け 中

アリアン

扉を開いた——そつ、確認を取らずに。

ポンタ

アーク

チヨメ



Prologue

Nozan Kingdom, on the Northern Continent.

Nozan Kingdom was separated from Rhoden Kingdom by the Bordeaux Gulf and the two nations maintained a relatively friendly diplomatic relationship through trade.

Three other countries touched upon the borders of Nozan Kingdom.

The Derufurento Kingdom lied to the north of Nozan and the Salma Kingdom to the south. Finally, the Hiruku Theocracy sat just west of Nozan. Throughout this region's history, many countries have risen and fallen.

Soulia, the capital of the Nozan Kingdom, had never been invaded. The Royal Palace was built upon a small hill, at the base of which the city began to spread out from. Two defensive walls bisected the city into districts and acted as its primary defensive structure.

The palace had been built with defense as the priority, there weren't all that many decorations and its simple design gave one the impression of a large fort.

However, the Palace's interior was decorated with gorgeous accessories showcasing the authority and prestige one would expect of a royal palace.

With its meticulously trimmed lawn and the early morning sunlight that enveloped the area, a sort of harmony between the palace's exterior and interior was created.

Rays of sunlight, which accompanied the coming morning, swept into the large window of a certain room where a young girl innocently slept.

The girl's slightly curly and golden hair reached her shoulder while her head rested on a soft pillow. With her childish figure and porcelain white skin, one would assume the girl was around ten years old.

The extravagance of her nightshirt, the fact that the bed she slept in was larger than necessary, and the canopy surrounding the bed hinted at the girl's social

standing.

The silence of the morning was suddenly disturbed by the ringing of bells.

The sound of the first bell echoing across the town originated from the edge of the city and eventually more bells began to ring until the sound reached the palace.

The unexpected noise caused the girl's eyebrows to fidget as she slowly opened her small eyes and searched her room for its source.

“..... Ehh, I hear something strange.....”

The girl spoke in a manner unbefitting of someone her age as she sat up and rubbed her eye in an attempt to wake up completely.

The girl tried to pat down her unruly bed head before she slid her small frame off of the bed and took a look outside her window.

However, she was only able to see the courtyard outside the window and couldn't grasp the nature of the ringing bell. After casting a general glance over the courtyard her sleepily eye gradually wandered toward the window latch.

At that moment a woman hastily ran into the girl's bedroom.

“Princess Lille! Pardon me!!”

The upset woman that entered the room was familiar to the young girl, so she tilted her head and called out to her.

“Nina, what made you so upset? I haven't overslept today.”

Lille suppressed a yawn as her eyes trailed across the room.

The woman had long, black hair that was tied in a single braid reaching her back and slightly slanted eyes with black pupils. She wore the uniform of Nozan's knight order over her sun-tanned skin while a sword with a heavily decorated hilt hung on her waist.

Nina Du Aburoa

Despite being the daughter of Nozan Kingdom's Viscount Aburoa, she earned the title of knight and was tasked with the protection of the young girl she was currently looking at.

The full name of Nina's small master was Lille Nozan Soulia

She was the third and youngest child of Nozan's King, King Asparuf Nozan Soulia, and also the first princess and a memento of the deceased queen.

"Princess Lille, enemies are attacking the capital! Hurry and get dressed, we must find the King!"

"What!? This is serious! What a second..... hya."

Lilli's eyes popped when she heard Nina's statement and she immediately began stripping off her nightshirt.

However, Lille struggled when the neck of the shirt caught on her hair.

After a while, she resigned herself to her fate and approached Nina, who'd been watching the princess's plight.

"Sorry, Nina, but I need you to help me change my clothes."

In response to her request, Nina knelled down and responded with:

"Yes, excuse me."

Normally, a lady in waiting and several other attendants would be present to help dress the princess, but this was an emergency. Nina may have been a skilled knight, but she wasn't used to dressing others, so she helped Lille into a simple dress.

Lille left her room in a brisk strut as soon as she could, but a man was already waiting for her when she crossed the threshold of her room.

"Zahar, come along as well. We'll go to where my father is."

The young man called Zahar offered Lille a brief nod before joining Nina who was following the princess.

Zahar Bahárov was a hundred and ninety centimeters tall and had a muscular build. He also had short chestnut hair and was cleanly shaven.

Similar to Nina, he was a knight serving as princess Lille's guard, but he was commoner who managed to achieve his position through his own strength.

The princess was accompanied by her two personal guards as she approached her father's office with a reserved dignity uncommon in one so young.

King Asparf had already assembled his top advisers and military personnel in the room by the time the princess arrived. Lille's older brothers, first Prince Teruva and second Prince Sevaru, the prime minister, and the General of the Army all surrounded the king.

The atmosphere in the room was wrought with a strange tension that was normally absent.

A map of the capital was spread out on the large desk that everyone stood around and Lille could just make out some wooden figures on top of it.

Princess Lille knew better than to disturb her father during an emergency so she tried to stretch her neck to get a better look at the map, but then a messenger ran into the room.

"Reporting! The enemy attacked from the forest at the base of Mt. Sobiru, and their numbers continue to grow as the assault continues! A definitive number can not be determined as they have yet to take formation, but they seem to number in the tens of thousands! I've never seen such numbers!"

Moans of unrest and surprise leaked from the mouths of those that heard the message's statement.

It was the King speaking up in an orderly tone that managed to calm the upheaval.

"What's the enemy's affiliation? Only one of the empires would be capable of launching such an attack, but we aren't connected to their territory..... has one of the neighboring countries fallen?"

The King was in the prime of his life and his dignified gaze was focused on the

messenger.

The people surrounding the King held their breath as they waited for the messenger's reply, Lille and her two guards did the same.

However, no one expected the answer the messenger spoke.

“There is no indication of the enemy's origins! In fact, the enemy isn't even human! Though they wear metal armor, the enemy are undead! The enemy is an army of undead!”

Dread permeated the messenger's voice and what he said caused the general in changes of defending the capital to shout.

“Are you mad!? Has anyone ever heard of undead, let alone armored undead, appearing in such numbers!?”

The messenger's face froze at the general's words and lowered his head.

“Unfortunately it's the truth, General! Every enemy soldier sighted was some form of undead. Numerous undead appeared in the nearby plains around dawn.”

Most of the room's occupants forced to hold their breath yet again.

“Furthermore, deformed monstrosities are mixed within the undead humans! One of our units was wiped out by a monstrous spider-human hybrid.”

As the room fell silent the sound of the still ringing alarm bell penetrated the room.

Everyone was digesting the contents of the report, but that didn't mean they were able to grasp an understanding of the situation.

It was King Asparf who managed to break the silence no one else could.

“A report from the ‘Watchtower’ came in some time ago. Whether the enemy is human or not, it is still a fact that the capital is facing its possible destruction.”

The King paused as he glanced at everyone in the room.

The “Watchtower” was an especially large tower built at the rear of the palace

that made it possible to get a bird's eye perspective of the entire capital.

Vigilant soldiers were permanently stationed there and even Princess Lille understood the importance of the area as she often played in.

“How many forces are at our current disposal?”

When the King asked the general that question, he was startled for a moment before he answered.

“Ha! Yes! Between the knights and guards, we should have four thousand soldiers! We can expect another thousand or so if we hire every adventurer and mercenary in the city!”

The King gave the general a nod as the gravity of the situation dawned on everyone.

“Hmm, it's fortunate that the enemy attacked before the city gates were opened, we shall engage in siege warfare..... Even if the enemy numbers in the tens of thousands, it's not enough to break a siege defense.”

The King looked up from the map on the table and focused on his two sons and princess Lille.

“The enemy appeared from the forest surrounding the Sobiru Mountains in the southwest. The capital has yet to be surrounded so there's still time to evacuate the citizens. Teruva and Sevaru, you will escape through the eastern gate and gather reinforcements from the eastern and northern territories respectively.

Both princes were resolute as they received the King's order.

Watching her older brothers' behavior filled princess Lille with a sense of pride for being a part of the royal family. She took a tentative step forward and calmly watched her father.

The two princes anxiously watched their little sister's behavior before looking towards their father and pleaded with him with their eyes.

The King hesitated for but a moment before slowly setting his eyes on his daughter.

“Lille, you are to seek reinforcements from Earl Dimo in the east. The earl’s personal soldiers are quite brave.”

The king had a faint smile on his face as he spoke.

Several retainers shared meaningful gaze when they heard the King’s decree and nodded in mutual agreement.

“Leave it to me, father! I swear on my name as Lille Nozan Soulia to fulfill my task and help resolve the crisis that has befallen our country!”

Lille stuck out her small chest and placed her hand over it.



The King narrowed his eye's in response to her behavior.

“Zahar, Nina..... protect Lille.”

The King gave the two knights charged with protecting his beloved daughter a severe look. Understanding the hidden meaning behind his words, the two bowed solemnly in response.

Princess Lille didn't notice, but the others were aware that the King's order was for her to seek refuge.

The Dimo Earldom was the southernmost territory of what had once been a part of Nozan Kingdom until seventy years ago, when an invasion from the Saima Kingdom forced the earldom to split off and form its own enclave.

Crossing into an enclave that neighbored other countries shouldn't be difficult to accomplish, but that was the easy part.

It was a demanding task to draw clear borderlines with monsters roaming about, so it was up to the nobility in charge of the fringe territories to decide which Kingdom they stood with.

So while it was possible to lead a small band of soldiers into the Dimo Earldom in a few days, one could not return with reinforcements without the Saima Kingdom spotting them.

A lot of soldiers would be necessary to beat back the undead horde..... but larger numbers would slow progression and be easily spotted by other country's patrols.

One needed to cross the Clyde Gulf by ship to reach the earldom, a five-day one-way trip from the capital via the Moruba river basin. Even if one rushed back with reinforcements, things would most likely be settled by then.

In short, the mission the King had given Lille was impossible to accomplish.

Though no one said anything about it.

The princes had both come of age and were already taking part in state affairs

and imperial obligations. On the other hand, Lille was still an eleven-year-old girl, despite her fortitude and royal status. It was also common knowledge that the King doted on the last child of the deceased queen.

If the worst happened, the royal bloodline would remain safe in the earldom..... that was the thought behind it.

“Not much time remains, make preparations for the three’s departure! We’ll herd the undead towards the western gate to buy time! General, I ask you take the lead!”

Everyone bowed once the King finished giving his order before getting to work.

Meanwhile, the wrinkles on the King’s forehead deepened as he looked westward.

“For this to happen the day after the Cardinal arrived for a visit..... Perhaps I could gain the support of the Holy Knight if I negotiate with Cardinal Liberalitas.”

As the King bemoaned the current situation, the prime minister beside him lowered his voice and began speaking.

“Asparf-sama, the army of undead could be the work of the ‘Undead King’. ”

The King raised an eyebrow when he heard what the prime minister said.

“‘Undead King’? Isn’t that just a legend the minstrels like to recite?”

“No, my King. Though the empire will never admit it, there is historical evidence of his appearance in the country one hundred years ago.”

The King Asparf choked on his words upon hearing that.

While a hundred years didn’t seem all that long, the short average human lifespan meant that events from a hundred years ago happened to those three generations ago.

The ‘Undead King’ the prime minister was a wide-reaching local legend.

It was said to have appeared without warning.

With its ability to control the undead, the monster laid waste to villages and towns one after another, increasing the number of undead it controlled, threatening all life.

However, it's undead empire was overthrown by the subjugation force raised to stop it.

It was a famous story that minstrels recited throughout the land, it was a tale parents told misbehaving children to frighten them.

— The 'Undead King' picks up naughty children and drags them to the underworld—

Phrases like that were handed down from generation to generation.

“There's a rumor of the empire borrowing the power of the Theocracy to defeat the Undead King. As a result, the nation can't oppose their teachings as strongly.”

The wrinkles on the King's forehead got deeper as he listened to the prime minister and sighed.

“.....However, the life of an entire country can't be decided on a whim.”

The King weakly shook his head as that final thought escaped his lips.



The occupant of a certain room inside the royal palace could hear the commotion beyond the room's wall.

The room was more luxurious than the other guest rooms in the palace as it was usually reserved for foreign diplomats.

The window in the room overlooked the capital's eastern district.

A single man looked in front of the glass window with a slight smile on his face as he watched the utter confusion of the current situation unfold.

The man in question wore heavy modified priest robes, had neatly trimmed black hair, and floated a gentle smile. His smile widened as he watched three carriages leave out the eastern gate in different directions.

“The royal family fleeing the country..... unlikely. So messengers seeking reinforcements then.”

This man was Cardinal Palermo Avaritia Liberalitas.

The most powerful figure within the Hiruku Theocracy was the Pope and directly below him were the seven cardinals.

The fact that he was allowed to stay within the diplomat's chambers showcased the amount of influence the Hiruku Religion had on the Northern Continent.

At the moment, however, the pope had been the one to order the undead to march on the capital.

By placing a large enough force around the capital, the main hub of the kingdom, one could effectively sever the chain of command as long as no gaps opened in the blockade.

“Hmhmhm, should I send pursuers after the messengers? Without the hope of reinforcements arriving the moral of those manning the walls will rot away..... such an unimaginable tragedy.”

Cardinal Liberalitas' twisted smirk was reflected in the window as he continued to think aloud.

The mild-mannered mask he usually wore gave way to his true personality. Above all other things, he took morbid pleasure in showcasing his superiority to those weaker than him.

“Even if reinforcements were to arrive, it would amount to nothing in the face of a hundred thousand undead. Seeing faces warped by despair..... is a joy that should be experienced quickly as possible. Hahaha”

Realizing that his true nature has revealed itself, Cardinal Liberalitas suppressed his impulse and donned his mild-manner facade again.

He began stroking his chin and raised a single eyebrow with a dissatisfied expression.

“..... However, it'd be a good idea to reinforce the hordes strength, it would certainly make it easier to gain control of this place. The question is, will increasing the horde's size effect my control over them?”

Palermo snorted as he said that.

“It may be best to consult the Pope about this matter should something come of it.....”

Palermo's eyes remained on the far-off eastern gate as he spoke, all the while the undead horde silently surrounded the city.

“For now, I'll enjoy my front row seat to this country's downfall.”

Another smirk would appear on Palermo's face shortly after his meeting with the King ended.

Chapter 01: Sunday Carpenter

The light of an early morning was shining down on me and the occasional gust of wind would rustle the tree leaves on this quiet mountain.

The massive Dragon King's Tree stood proudly at the summit of the mountain, boasting of Mother Nature's prowess. The tree's massive branches and leaves cast a natural umbrella over the area.

Sunlight poured through the foliage, creating spots of lights which illuminated the working area.

A little bit off the mountain's beaten path stood the remains of a Shinto-style building. The roof had rotted away to the point that it fell in on itself, while the colonnade still pierced the sky.

The sunlight that managed to penetrate the foliage and the remains of the roof were reflected by the armor I wore.

The suit of pristine silver armor had fine details etched into it with white and blue undertones. A jet-black mantle, inlaid with a pattern seemingly cut from the starry night sky, hung from my shoulders and rustled in the wind. While the armor was befitting of a fairy tale knight, the mythical sword and shield I usually held..... weren't in my hands.

Instead, I held a wooden handle.

A metal trowel was attached to the handle and had a lump of a gray, mud-like substance sitting on it. It was the mortar used to hold bricks together.

After arranging a line of bricks I would apply an even layer of mortar on it before stacking more bricks on it.

"Hmm, that should do it....."

I took a step back and looked at the brick structure with its semicircular entrance as I thought aloud.

What I was building was a brick kiln for my kitchen.

Even though I had been able to successfully acquire the gas-stove-like magic tool the elves used, a kiln was necessary to bake bread, a staple food in this world, with my own hands.

It would have been impossible to call craftsmen to such a remote location, and despite it having been a challenge to gather the materials I did a decent enough job, if I do say so myself.

Luckily a peddler I knew in Lanbaltic had managed to gather everything I needed to construct the kiln, so the material costs weren't that high.

Once the kiln was dry, I could bake pizzas as well as bread.

I'd found tomatoes on the Southern Continent and it would just be wrong not to make it.

With various possibilities in mind, I took a wet cloth and wiped the excess mortar and dirt off the bricks.

While I was working, Ponta appeared out of nowhere and ran up to my feet.

"Kyun!"

Having a body length of about sixty centimeters, the head of a fox, the appendages of a flying squirrel and a fluffy tail, Ponta was what was known as a spirit beast in this world.

Though her underbelly was covered in white fur, the rest of her body had light green fur that made it easy for her to blend into grass or trees.

"Ohh, Ponta. Where have you been playing all this time?"

I put down the trowel and started running my fingers over Ponta's head as I spoke.

Ponta happily began nuzzling my hand in response.

"Kyun! Kyun!"

She began waving her cotton-like tail as her large ears began to twitch in response to the sensation she felt. A sudden roar caused me to immediately turn around.

Tearing my eyes away from Ponta I was greeted with the face of a massive beast looking into the kitchen window.

No, it would be more accurate to call it a massive reptile rather than a beast.

It stood four meters tall. Two large horns grew from the creature's head, reddish-brown scales covered its entire body like a set of armor and a mane of white hair trailed down from its head to its tail.

Giyuriiin

Despite its bulky body, the creature's cry was rather high pitched, and its white mane glittered in the morning sun as it started shaking its head.

Its head was too large to fit inside the window so it started rubbing its neck against the wall and snorting in protest.

“Oh, were you and Shiden playing together?”

I spoke the creature's name as I approached the window and began patting Shiden's head as he glared at me.

Shiden blinked his reptilian eyes in rapid succession while i was petting him.

I think he's gotten comfortable in this environment.

He originally lived in the great plains of the Southern Continent..... the nomadic Tiger Tribe called creatures like Shiden dragon mounts for obvious reasons.

However, after my considerable contributions to the beastmen of the Southern Continent in a recent incident, the leaders of the Tiger Tribe gifted me this mount as a sign of 'Friendship'.

Shiden was the size of a car and I wanted to decline the offer, but repeated claims of “This is proof of our friendship” made it difficult to refuse.

As a person who had received the name of an elven village (by proxy), I was the de facto representative of said village, so outright declining the gift might have hindered future relations.

That's what I convinced myself of anyway.

Shiden's dignified appearance would certainly catch the attention of humans, but fortunately this mountainous region was quite a distance away from human settlements and the nearest beastmen village will be on the other side of a forest once it was completed.

Being able to handle loads greater than any horse could, Shiden would come in handy when I needed to make any long journeys on foot.

The leader of the Ena clan, the largest of the Tiger Tribe clans, also provided me with "devil nails", the chili peppers that I ventured into their territory to obtain in the first place.

Perhaps it'd be a good idea to make pepper sauce or tomato chili.

"It's been ten days since..... no about two weeks since then."

The memories of what happened on the Southern Continent flooded my mind as I continued to pet Shiden.

"Though you've gotten used to the forest, it might be a good idea to take you to a large grassy plain....."

Dragon mounts were rather intelligent creatures since, even if left alone, they would find their own food and a safe place to sleep.

When I tried to wash him in the hot spring, Shiden became rather restless and I couldn't figure out why until I noticed who was already occupying the spring.

After that, whenever the Dragon King Williahsfim, the ruler of this land, came down from his tree Shiden would go hide in the forest until he left.

Well, that was a response you'd expect from a normal animal.

There weren't many animals like Ponta who had the courage to play around with

the Dragon King's long tail while he soaked in the spring.

In any case, Shiden was from the plains, to begin with. The forest..... let alone the location of my home, was located close to the summit of the mountain and didn't much in the way of open fields.

Since our closest neighbors were building their village on the peninsula along the lake in the east, it may be a good idea to travel there once in awhile.

While praising my own ideas, I noticed someone behind me and turned around.

Ariane's lilac skin was slightly flushed and her wet, snow-white hair was wrapped in a large piece of cloth.

She must have just finished her dip in the hot springs before she came here.

Ariane must have liked the hot spring more than I initially thought, because every once in awhile she would join me on these excursions and spend her time soaking in the water.

Instead of her usual form-fitted leather armor, she wore traditional elven clothes which had unique patterns sewn into it. She was exactly like a beauty relaxing after a bath.

"Ah, already finished with the stove? Arc, you're rather skilled at this type of thing....."

Ariane was taking a look inside the kiln I'd just finished putting together when those words of praise slipped from her lips.

Her abundant chest adhered to the law of gravity and the front of her outfit, which came together like a yukata, started to come undone.

Just as I was about to glance at her magnificent figure from behind the safety of my helmet, Ponta ran towards Ariane at full speed and jumped into her chest.

"Wait a minute, Ponta! haha! That tickles! hi hi hi."



— Such an envious position to be in.

That foolish thought sprung from my mind as I watched a beautiful woman and cute animal play.

Once Ponta settled down, Ariane let out a tired breath before turning to me.

“Arc, it’s around lunch time so how about we go back to the village?”

I looked up at the sky to confirm what she said and sure enough, the sun hung high in the sky.

I had been so obsessed with building the kiln that I didn’t even notice it was already noon.

“Hmm. There are a couple of things I want to work on, but I can come back to them later.”

After replying, I packed up my tools and walked to the front yard with Ariane and Ponta.

We were a simple use of Transfer Gate away from reaching Raratoia.

“Shiden, hold down the fort while we’re gone.”

“Giyurrrrii!”

As the magic formation began to glow beneath our feet, I gave a final order to Shiden, who responded with a shake of his mane.

It was an exchange we’ve developed since I acquired Shiden.

After Ponta said goodbye to her new friend, the magic was invoked and everything faded to black.

Chapter 02: Kitchen Lunch

The Great Canada forest spread out over the southeastern region of the Northern Continent.

Long ago this area had been considered barren land, but the elves fled persecution by cultivating the forest through mystical means. Now the forest, and the numerous monsters inhabiting it, acted as a natural barrier that kept humans away.

However, multiple elven villages resided in this forest.

The elves' prowess with magic and their walls allowed them to create almost fairy tale-like villages.

The village was dotted with mushroom-shaped wooden houses, and a mansion fused with a large tree stood at the village's center.

Of all the elven villages, the one named Raratoia was the one led by Ariane's father and the one I currently resided in.

The large residence we stood in front of was elder's home and where Ariane had been raised.

While this tree-house hybrid was thin compared to the Dragon King's tree, its trunk was considerably larger than the average human home. The branches on the tree rose high into the sky and the leaves cast a deep shadow over the area.

I followed Ariane as she walked into the mansion unimpeded.

Stepping into the main hall I was greeted with the sight of two parallel stairways leading up to the second floor, where the dining room was.

Inside the dining room was a woman with an aura similar to Ariane's, and when she saw us entering the room a smile started to bloom on her face.

"Oh, you finally came back? Arc-kun said that he'd be making lunch today, I

was thinking of postponing it if you didn't return soon."

The woman was Ariane's mother and the wife of the current village elder.

Glenys Aruna Raratoia acted as the substitute village elder while her husband was away on business, and she didn't look much older than Ariane.

Given the longevity of elves, in general, you couldn't accurately judge their age by appearances alone.

In any case, trying to assign an age to Glenys was the equivalent of jumping head first into my own grave. Glenys was the one that taught Ariane swordsmanship, and in all the sparring sessions I had with her I was never able to put up much of a fight.

I offered an apology to her still smiling visage.

"Sorry, Glenys-dono. I got a little too absorbed in making the kiln."

I originally planned to work only for a couple of hours, so I had offered to make lunch today.

I went to the kitchen in the dining room while still wearing my armor.

Humans used firewood to cook in this world, but elves were able to maintain higher living standards through the use of a magic tool.

There was actually an stove for firewood in the kitchen, but next to it was also a tool that looked kinda like a gas stove..

Since the only alternative were magic stones, it wasn't all that surprising that firewood was the predominant fuel source.

"That reminds me, what were you messing around with last night, Arc?"

Ariane looked into the kitchen as I started to get to work.

Her eyes looked over the two bowls I held in my hands.

The two ceramic bowls contained dried tomatoes and mushrooms that were soaking in water.

“It a new seasoning I’m trying to make.”

I began removing the tomatoes and mushrooms from the bowls as I replied.

I was challenging myself to make soy sauce this time around.

Normally soy sauce was made by fermenting koji and soybeans, but the process was quite complicated, requiring precise timing and temperature management. It’s unlikely that an amateur like myself would be able to make it.

However, it should be possible for me to produce a chemical equivalent of soy sauce.

The first step was to soak tomatoes and mushrooms in water.

The recipe actually required morels, but I haven’t seen those in this world. That’s why I used some aromatic mushrooms Glenys had recommended.

Visually, they resembled eryngii.

I poured the contents of the bowls into a pot full of minced chicken breast.

Next, I placed the pot over the fire to cook.

The ‘stock’ component of the arrangement was almost done.

After a slight smell and taste test, I was confident that it was a delicious stock.

However, Ariane grimaced when she caught a whiff of what I was making.

“.....What is that? It doesn’t smell all that enticing.....”

I started to shrug my shoulders at Ariane’s apparent disgust but stopped.

My Japanese upbringing meant that I had gotten used to the smell, but I knew foreigners compare it to steamed laundry. I guess it depended on what one was accustomed to.

Well, let’s finally make the substitute soy sauce.

Ultimately, so long as I had the amino acid and sugar I had the base needed for

the soy sauce.

First there was the amino acid: I put the leftovers of the minced chicken I had put into the stock into a bowl and carefully started mixing in maple syrup, a specialty of Canada Forest, into the pot as a replacement for the sugar.

As I began to raise the temperature, the Maillard reaction started to take effect as the minced chicken and stock started browning. At that point, I added salt and liquor to the mix and put out the fire.

“Hmm, it should be done.”

I dipped a finger into the dark brown liquid inside the pot and tasted it.

While not exactly what I expected, it resembled soy sauce well enough.

Since I could only get my hands on a white-wine-like liquor, the taste harkened back to western flavors. It was the difference between soy sauce () and soy sauce ().

Even though I didn't use any soy to begin with.

Ariane sat nearby and held Ponta in her arms as they watched me working. The way their nose twitched showed their interest in the soy sauce.

“How is it, Ariane-dono? The stench no longer bothers you?”

She thought about it for a moment before shaking her head.

“The smell changed a while ago. How should I say..... it now gives off a pleasant aroma.”

There wasn't a hint of rejection in her voice.

The teriyaki chicken I planned to make should suit her taste..... as I thought such things I began to soak the chicken in the sauce. Glenys suddenly noticed something and got out of her seat in the dining room.

She went down to the first floor and a few minutes later Glenys returned with someone I hadn't seen in awhile.

“Oh, Dylan-dono. You finally returned.”

The person appearing behind Glenys’ back, after noticing Ariane and me inside the kitchen, smiled and gave us a small wave with his hand.

“Arc-kun, Ariane. I just returned a few minutes ago. It was quite the long stay in Rhoden’s capital but we were able to make significant headway as a result.”

As I’d said, Dylan Targ Raratoia, Ariane’s father and the Raratioia’s elder had finally returned.

His long pointed ears were partially concealed by his green-tinged blonde hair and his slender build was common among regular elves.

“I also brought along a guest for you two.”

There was a big smile on his face as he looked behind himself.

Ariane’s and me naturally followed his line of sight and spotted a single girl standing behind him.

“Chiome-chan!? What are you doing here?”

Ariane was surprised when she realized who the girl was.

The cat ears topping Chiome’s raven black hair and her long tail stood up a little as she lowered her head in a formal greeting.

“It’s been a while Ariane-dono, Arc-dono.”

Her tail was swaying joyfully to the left and right, expressing an abundance of emotions unlike her unchanging facial expression..

After the Southern Continent affair was settled, I returned Chiome to the hidden mountain village the Blade Heart Clan currently occupied.

Chiome’s missing brother-figure and senior disciple had become an undead and she had had the difficult task of ending his existence.

I’d dropped her off in the hidden village so that she could give her report about the whole affair.

“.....Chiome-dono, are you doing alright?”

I didn't know what to say to Chiome after our long separation, so I only asked a vague question.

It's only been half a month and I doubted a proper funeral had been held yet.

I couldn't imagine it would be an easy thing to come to terms with having to kill someone you loved like a brother.

Chiome turned her clear blue eyes straight at me as she offered me a slight nod.

“Yes. After I returned to the village, I gave my report to Hanzo-sama and held the funer——”

Chiome's swinging tail dropped immediately and her head dropped when she tried to say the last bit, Ariane couldn't even keep the worry off of her face.

“Chiome-chan.....”

“Afterwards, I left to investigate Sasuke-oniichan's final words by tracing his steps up until his disappearance.....”

After a brief pause she managed to finish her piece, she then looked in my direction again.

Sasuke's last words..... although I didn't hear them, she had told me he'd said: “Watch out for the Church”.

It could be inferred that the reason behind his undead condition had something to do with the Hiruku Theocracy.

Both Chiome and Ariane both agreed that when they had confronted him, Sasuke had demonstrated unusual behavior for an undead.

Normally, an undead was spontaneously raised when a corpse was exposed to large amounts of miasma.

Even then, suitable conditions needed to be met for the undead to rise, that's the reason why the most common types of undead were the rotting zombies and

stripped-clean skeletons.

However, when Sasuke appeared in front of us, he lacked any distinguishing features that would mark him as an undead.

It was only thanks to Ariane's elven ability to see "Undead Impurities" and Chiome animalistic sense of smell that we could even tell he'd been undead.

It was only because of those abilities that they determined the skeleton under my suit of armor wasn't undead and why I could live as I did now. If they said Sasuke had been undead, then it was a reliable assertion.

Things only became more complicated when you consider that Sasuke acted with a clear purpose despite being undead, a horde of undead appeared when we finally caught up to him, and there was that unknown monstrosity that broke out of the church.

Taking all of those things into account, it was unlikely that the Blade Heart Clan could ignore Sasuke's last words.

".....However, a problem arose when I tried to investigation the country. According to Sasuke-nisan's last report, he was travelling across the Febinto marsh in the northwestern part of Rhoden Kingdom in order to enter Delfuento Kingdom. We lost contact with him shortly after that."

Ariane and I shared a look as the meaning of this visit became clear.

Chiome observed us as she continued her explanation.

"When a mission takes my clansmen on extended journeys they utilize the resources and hideout our 'Kusa' network has available, but the hideout had been destroyed when we arrived there."

It appeared that 'kusa' was the name of the network they used for their ninja activities. If they were to loose one of them, it would become a lot harder to gather information.

"Chiome-dono, I can understand the value of a kusa, but what of the whereabouts of the people stationed at the hideout?"

A bit of worry appeared on Chiome's face at my question.

"The teaching of the Hiruku religion is deeply rooted within the Theocracy and the three surrounding nations, it is a place where elves and my people normally don't tread. It wouldn't be out of the ordinary if they were killed or enslaved once found. That's why the hideout didn't have too many people stationed there. I came here because I made it there and got stuck in my investigation."

Chiome clenched her fists as regret washed over her.

Dylan, who'd been silent till now, took over the conversation as Chiome tried to tamp down her emotions.

"Since Arc-kun has helped them before, they wanted to ask for his help again which is why they contacted me during my stay in Rhoden's capital..... That's the gist of it. Still, their information network and infiltrations skills are rather impressive. I almost fainted when she suddenly appeared in my room in the castle."

The casualness of Dylan's comment somewhat eased the heavy atmosphere.

"Hoo, does this mean our destination this time is the Hiruku Theocracy?"

Chiome's eyes popped open when I asked that question.

"!? Arc-dono, you'll help.....? I haven't even brought up the reward yet....."

I detected something like uncertainty in her voice as she awkwardly asked her question.

This request was different from the last request to free her brethren, this time it was about a family member..... she had a personal interest in what had happened to Sasuke.

In any case, something about his last words left me anxious.

"There are things I would like to look into as well. And if I can help Chiome-dono, I will gladly lend you my power."

Chiome's ears did a little pitter-patter when she lowered her head to me.

Chapter 03: Doranto Village

The doctrine of the Hiruku religion discriminated against elves and beastmen.

The secret behinds Sasuke's transformation into an undead and perhaps the origins of that undead horde we encountered seemed to lie in the Hiruku Theocracy.

I'd personally seen some of those undead acting with purpose.

We also encountered a horde of undead skeletons under the control of spider chimera in the cavern that opened up the Wind Dragon Mountain Range.

That group of undead certainly moved with purpose.

..... Something big was happening, but I didn't know what it was.

Maybe I'm simply overthinking things?

While I was lost in thought, Ariane declared that she would be taking part in this latest expedition.

"Me too! I will go along as well! It's a friend's request and I would worry if Arc was left to handle it alone."

While Ariane was sticking out her chest, I decided to ask her something that had been on my mind.

"..... That reminds me, Ariane you're supposed to be a warrior of Maple right? Yet, you spent quite a lot of time in Raratoia."

"!? That's....."

Ariane choked on her words and avoided eye contact instead of replying.

A full on smile appeared on Glenys' face and she looked me directly at me as she placed her arms around her daughter from behind.

“Ara, Ari-chan? You haven’t told him yet?”

Her expression and the way she talked down to Ariane was clue enough that whatever they were talking about was important.

Interested, I decided to see how this exchange played out.

“Ari-chan, didn’t you recently change your last name? It’s now Raratoia like Arc-kun’s, right?”

Ariane tried to pull away from her mother as she spoke.

I must have imagined the tips of Ariane’s ears turning a bright shade of red..... that was it.

“Oh, I guess Ariane-dono and I are neighbors then.”

She turned her eyes away from me after I said that.

“.....The transfer is only for the purpose of monitoring you until you properly adjust to the village. Just leave it at that.”

Dylan finally reacted to the exchange between his family.

“What was that? Arc-kun has taken Raratoia as his last name? When was the invitation offered, Glenys?”

“Hmm, Glenys offered me the invitation a little while ago. However, officiating the approval was put on hold until your return.....”

Dylan gave me a satisfied smile and nodded his head after I explained the circumstance of the situation.

“Well, that’s good. It would be fine if you joined the village Arc-kun, having your strength will certainly be a convenience. Considering the special circumstances it might be for the best to have a knowledgeable person you’re familiar with by your side.”

He looked his daughter in the eye and smiled when he said that.

Well, now I’ve officially joined Raratoia without too much of an issue.

“The conversation seems to have gotten off-topic, but since you accepted Chiome-kun’s request, why don’t you join me on a little excursion and enter the Hiruku Theocracy from Salma Kingdom on the southern coast?”

Glenys became puzzled about what Dylan had said.

“You too? You’re going on another trip?”

There was a hint of irritation in Gleny’s voice and Dylan quickly gave an explanation while trying to maintain a smile.

“No, you see, I returned to the capital just as a request for aid came from Doranto, the great elders tasked me to handle it since the village’s elder is an acquaintance. I can’t decline a direct request from the great elders. Sorry.”

Glenys breathed out an exasperated sigh and gave a Dylan’s a downcast look.

“It’s alright. I’ll save my complaints for my father.”

After saying that, Glenys pouted and turned away from Dylan, causing his shoulders to slump.

It was Ariane who managed to break up her parent’s discussion.

“Doranto sent out a request for aid? What happened? The village is usually self-sufficient, did you hear anything about the situation there?”

Since I’d just been accepted into the village and had no clue about the inner-workings of elven society I pay close attention to the now grim-faced Dylan.

“Chiome informed me on our way here that Doranto had been attacked by undead for some reason and it seems that spider-like creatures like the ones you faced in the Wind Dragon Caverns led them.....”

Ariane looked in my direct when she heard that.

“What happened to the village?”

“The three creatures that appeared brought along armored, undead soldiers. They suddenly appeared in Rouen forest and caused a good deal of damage. I’m

expected to depart from Landfria tomorrow, along with warriors and healers to reinforce their defenses and treat the injured.”

All of us were surprised by what he’d said.

“Tomorrow, that’s rather sudden, isn’t it? I’m capable of some healing magic as well, would you like my assistance?”

Dylan shook his head at my offer before explaining the situation.

“I’m grateful for the offer, but..... Doranto isn’t too eager about accepting outsiders. Chiome is a person of the Fields and Mountains and Dark Elves aren’t welcomed there.”

Dylan’s shoulders shook a bit as he attempted a feeble laugh.

Even within the elven race, there existed various schools of thought.

It was a rather natural response if you think about it. Even though I’d been welcomed into Raratoia, that was only because Ariane’s father was the elder and he was an understanding man. It is only by his good graces that I’ve been allowed even a shallow amount of acceptance here.

In any case, something still worried me about this.....

“You mentioned Rouen forest and said you had to sail from Landfria to reach it, is the village requesting aid not affiliated with the Great Canada Forest?”

“It’s as you say, Doranto lies in the Rouen forest just west of here. It’s an independent village that connects to the Southern Sea.”

“I was under the impression that all elves followed the first chieftain, but it seems that I was mistaken.”

When I voiced my thoughts in response to Dylan’s statement, Ariane shook her head beside me and spoke up.

“Those of Doranto didn’t reply to the chieftain’s summon. They hold firm to the old elven customs that existed when we were spread across the continent. Apparently, they were a warrior clan in the past.”

Her displeasure was visible in the way her shoulders slumped.

Ariane didn't seem all that enthusiastic about Doranto.

"However, the enemy must have been quite powerful, and the damage they dealt quite severe, if that xenophobic warrior clan asked for help. Where the spider monsters we faced capable of such a thing?"

It certainly would be difficult for normal people to handle a spider chimera. Ariane was a warrior of Maple, the best Canada had to offer, and Chiome was one of the six great ninjas of the Blade Heart Clan, and they were capable of..... I shook my head a few times.

.....They won because there'd been two of them.

Dylan only maintained the smile on his face and didn't offer her a reply.

However, Glenys did speak up.

"They rely on the old ways. The low village population allows their warriors to receive higher quality training. Also, it's against the law for women to be trained or act as warriors..... Dark Elves face harsh treatment as well."

Glenys pouted in a similar fashion as Ariane once she was done speaking.

The two seemed to be in agreement as far as Doranto was concerned.

In any case, the population size is an important variable to account for in terms of quality. The exclusion of women would also narrow down the number of warriors.

At first glance, it seemed like the rule was set in place to protect women from the dangers of the occupation, but that argument loses steam when you consider those like Ariane and Glenys, who put most men to shame in terms of combat skill.

Whether or not it was a protective measure was a judgment that I couldn't make since I don't know the inner-workings of Doranto.

"From what I heard, the village falls behind in terms of magic tool quality."

Chiome joined the conversation with a bit of information she picked up.

“Hmm.....”

“That.....”

“Huh?”

Dylan, Glenys, and Ariane exchanged glances with one another as they struggled to come up with an answer.

Apparently, there was a reason for the disparity. It could have simply been due to the larger population in Canada Forest..... but I’ve never seen that type of reaction.

— Kyukurin kyuuruuuuu

As I thought it over the sound of someone’s stomach growling caused everyone to search for the source.

Ariane thought she was the cause at first, which caused her to hold her stomach and blush in embarrassment.

“Ky-un.....”

Her efforts were in vain, however, as Ponta let out a weak cry and unsteadily walked towards me with a feeble shake of her tail.

It seems that Ponta was the source of the sound.

“Our talk went on for quite a while. Since the meat only needs to be the cooked, lunch will be ready in a little bit. We can continue talking afterward.”

I picked up the chicken and soy sauce and moved everything to the stove as I spoke.

Everyone nodded at my suggestion as I got to work finishing today’s lunch.

The peculiar smell of the homemade soy sauce began to spread through the mansion as the teriyaki broiled, raising the anticipation.

Every once in awhile Ponta would stop pacing around my legs, crane her neck up at the stove, and bite my foot before repeating the cycle again.

Though it was a substitute sauce, the heat brought out the appropriate smell.

The person within my mind couldn't stop smiling at the prospect of eating the finished teriyaki.

My current body didn't have a stomach, yet it seemed to cry out in hunger.

Chapter 04: Setting Sail Once More

The next day, at the southernmost tip of Great Canada Forest.

The elven village located here overlooked the Southern Sea and was rather large compared to other villages.

The beastmen Kingdom of Fabuna'ha on the Southern Continent was Landfria's main trading partner. As a result, this village was larger and more densely populated than Raratoia.

One could also see visiting beastmen mixed within the elven clouds.

The fused tree buildings that were a rarity in Raratoia were the predominant structures here, there were even walkways connecting some of the taller buildings that were in use.

It was like a forest and a modern city had fused together, and honestly, it made me feel like I was simultaneously seeing a fantasy and futuristic city.

The particular roads beneath the trees were beautifully paved over with brick and were packed with elves and beastmen going about their business.

The jet black mantle covering my silver armor, the shield on my back and sword on my waist, together with Ponta sitting comfortably on my head, meant that all eyes were focused on our group.

Since I was used to this type of situation I did my best to ignore the stares and whispers.

"I never imagined I'd return to Landfria so soon."

"Kyun!"

Ponta briskly wagged her tail on my helmet when she responded to my statement.

Our usual travel companions were close by.

Ariane, my self-assigned overseer, and Chiome, the master of espionage. Dylan was a new, if temporary addition this time around.

The relief force he would be leading into Doranto had already been assembled.

From what I heard, the group of twenty healers and warriors of the relief force were already gathered at the port.

As we entered the district surrounding the harbor, the elven mushroom-shaped houses started to replace the tree hybrid buildings.

We were now in the so-called commercial district.

Barkers were all over the place trying to sell miscellaneous goods brought over from Fabuna'ha, and combined with the distinct aroma, gave the area a unique atmosphere.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Since a lot of foods stuffs passed through the port, Ponta would frequently shift around on my helmet and cry out when a scent caught her interest.

“Ponta, we're heading straight to the port today, we can't make a side trip.”

Ariane had a slight smile on her face as she tried to explain things to Ponta, whose dejection was as clear as day when her fluffy tail dropped down.

“Don't worry, Ponta. I'll make you something on the ship.”

I raised the leather bag I'd been carrying as I spoke. Ponta's wagged her tail and started moving around on my helmet again.

Chiome's eyes brightened and her small nose and cat ears twitched when she overheard what I said.

Though her deadpan expression remained, her tail began to sway as she got a whiff of the bag's contents.

“Arc-dono, that smells similar to the 'teriyaki chicken' you made yesterday.”

Her guess was a little off, while I did make use of the substitute soy sauce, this time I put to together the easily transportable yakitori, not teriyaki.

Normally you'd season yakitori with salt, but I made do by dipping the chicken in the sauce after grilling it.

Unfortunately, the sauce seemed to be leaking in the bag and the yakitori had an irregular taste to it.

Just in case the flavor was too strong for Ponta, I'd brought along some dried fruit.

As I checked the contents of the bag by weight, I realized that I hadn't heard an essential piece of information for our voyage.

"Dylan-dono, how long in this trip going to take?"

For some reason, Dylan became a little depressed at my question.

"It should take around four days. I'm not that good with boats, so I'm a bit nervous."

Seeing as the last voyage to the Southern Continent only took a day, by a simple calculation this trip would be four times the distance, though I haven't seen the itinerary yet so it was just a rough estimate.

However, four days on the open sea would certainly take it's toll on Dylan if his statement was to be believed.

Chiome entered my line of sight while I was thinking about the trip in my head.

Being enticed by the yakitori, Chiome's appearance was befitting of a girl of her age.

"By the way, are no other member of your clan joining us?"

There were six great ninjas within the Blade Heart Clan, Chiome being one of them, that were the pinnacle of the clan's strength. yet it was rare to see them working together.

Chiome took her eyes away from the leather bag and regained her normal deadpan expression when I asked her about what was on my mind.

“It’s alright, other members of my clan are continuing to trace Sasuke-oniisan’s steps from the Delfuento Kingdom side. I was the one who suggested requesting your assistance, but I would investigate the Hiruku Theocracy even if I couldn’t obtain your help.”

Quiet determination was blazing in Chiome’s blue eyes after she’d finished her powerful reply.

To see a loved one’s miserable end at your own hands was not something you could just let go.

I didn’t know if this would have been what Sasuke wanted of her..... but no one would be able to stop her in this pursuit.

In fact, she might not have been able to forgive herself if she did nothing.

“Well, it’s possible we’ll cross paths with them along the way,”

“Really? The total land mass of the Hiruku Theocracy and the three neighboring countries is larger than Rhoden Kingdom’s. Without our network, my clansmen may not be able to keep up with your ‘Steps’, Arc-dono.”

We’d passed through the commercial area we talked..... my eyes naturally traveled to the hill that overlooked the sea in front of us.

Still, I couldn’t get over Chiome’s dangerous attitude.

Ariane had been listening to our conversation, when I gave her a sideways glance I saw her pointed ears drooped a bit and her worry was clearly seen on her face.

Looking back down at the leather bag, I thought back to how Chiome looked during lunch yesterday.

She’d stuffed her face with the teriyaki chicken I’d made with great relish.

“Arc-dono, what is this? I’ve never tasted anything like it. It’s delicious.”

Her blue eyes had been wide open as she went back to devouring the chicken after voicing her praise.



Ariane had a surprised look on her face when she tried a piece of teriyaki.

“The smell it had while it was being made was a bit much, but fully cooked it tastes wonderful.”

The two of them seemed to have taken to the soy sauce.

“Ara, what an interesting seasoning.”

Glenys also seemed satisfied with the new seasoning and nodded in my direction.

“It’s something modeled after a seasoning called soy sauce. It still needs a little work but it’s passable for a first attempt.”

I let out a relieved sigh in knowing that the Western-style false sauce was well received.

I’d like it if this new seasoning spread throughout the elven race if possible.

Chiome had finished eating during that exchange and held out her plate for another helping.

As she stuffed her face with her second serving Chiome gave me a slight smile.

“Arc-dono. I would like to spread this throughout my village, could you teach me how to make it?”

I nodded and gave Chiome my consent.

“I don’t mind. Spread it to any village you like.”

Chiome’s cat ears stood up and happiness showed on her face.

Sometimes “It’s delicious” was not enough to describe the euphoric feeling eating good food stirred within someone.

I don’t remember cooking for other people in a while, but ever since coming to the world, I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to do so.

It's kind of ironic that people in this world were closer despite the lower population, while the higher populated modern world was more alone.

A self-mocking chuckle escaped my lips when I had that thought.

The image of that young girl devouring my homemade dish crossed my mind..... if she was able of making a face like that then it still wasn't too late for her.

She was one of my few friends in this strange otherworld. It's possible that my feelings of friendship were one-sided, but that was a trivial matter in the end.

With the abnormal amount of power I wielded, I should be able to help her..... an assertion born of fact, not arrogance.

While some of my more transcendent abilities were still a bit much for me to handle, I was grateful for my absurdity.

Though I didn't mean to over- or underestimate my abilities, my only handicap was my lack of experience.

After we returned from the Southern Continent I had Glenys instruct me in basic swordsmanship.

Standing beside Chiome, I clenched my fist and looked out towards the horizon.

Ariane suddenly called us from behind and pointed in a certain location.

“Hurry up you two, the ship's already anchored in the port.”

When I looked where she pointed I saw Dylan heading into a building above the harbor, and I quickly followed after him.

The building served numerous functions and housed a magic powered elevated that connected to the dock built into the cave below the cliff.

Multiple ships were docked in the underground harbor and a few of them had already set sail.

Dylan headed straight for one of the docked ships.

The ship was smaller than the Liebbelta we took to the Southern Continent.

Considering that the Liebbelta had been a hundred meter long ship, a vessel half that size couldn't be considered small by regular standards.

The ship was similar to the Liebbelta with the two large mast towering above the ship's deck, the hull was composed of a whitish, metallic substance and several embrasures that lined it.

Muscular dark elves were restlessly moving around the ship in order to finish preparations for departure.

Standing in front of the anchored ship were twenty fully armored elves that stood a little straighter when they noticed Dylan approaching,

They must have been the relief team being dispatched to Doranto.

The group consisted entirely of elves with pointed ears and green-tinged blonde hair. I saw a familiar face within the group.

I remembered his unfriendly disposition when we worked together to free elven slaves in Diento, however, wrinkles form on his brow when as he looked in my direction.

I believe his name was Danka.

When Ariane saw him, the two offed each other a slight nod as a greeting, the wrinkles on his brow deepened and he immediately turned his attention to Dylan.

I guess that was to be expected considering I've yet to earn his complete trust.

After my not so warm reunion, Dylan stood before the people gathered here and greeting them.

"Ladies and gentlemen, under the elder council's order we shall journey to Doranto in the west. You all should have been informed already, but we're being dispatch to answer a request for aid. However, it is likely that we will be overwhelmed. However, I ask of you to tell me any concerns you have instead of becoming confrontational."

He observed the group's reaction after saying that.

Some of them seemed to comprehend and accept what he said while others became grim-faced about it.

The atmosphere surrounding Doranto wasn't all that pleasant, even I could pick up on that in my skeletal form.

"Ariane-dono, the opinion of the village isn't that good.."

I told Ariane my opinion while we watched the scene play out in front of us.

She shrugged her shoulders and let out a sigh.

"Well, it's a complicated subject. While their elder is a sensible person..... but it's like my father said, the village as a whole dislike outsiders....."

It was as if she was describing the backcountry of the elven world.

"Please board the ship. Once everyone is aboard, we'll set sail."

At Dylan's command, everyone picked up their luggage and started to board the ship.

Ariane and I followed behind them and climbed the bridge leading to the deck.

"Arc-kun could you come here."

Shortly after we were on board, Dylan called for me.

I simply followed him as he went below deck.

While the interior wasn't too complicated, it wasn't all that simple either. We passed several rooms and other compartments while Dylan lead us through the ship.

"Kyun!"

Each time we passed someone in the hall Ponta would let out a cry and cause said person to give me a strange look before moving on.

We continued like this until we reached an open cabin in the stern of the ship where Ariane and Chiome sat.

The room wasn't that large, but had stylish furnishings and a bunk bed on each side of the room.

Ponta leaped onto the bed to check its softness and appeared to be satisfied with it after kicking the bedding around.

When Ariane and I started surveying the room Dylan turned around to face me.

"I am sorry, but as you can see, this ship isn't that large. Because of the lack of space, you three will be sharing this room."

Saying that he had some other business to take care of Dylan left the cabin with a carefree smile on his face.

Ariane tried to chase after Dylan but she turned around like she was a mechanized doll in desperate need of oil.

Her face shifted through various complex impressions as a groan escaped her lips.

The ship's size and the importance of the relief mission meant that she couldn't complain to Dylan about this. Ariane was the one who volunteered to join this Sasuke follow-up after all.

After a bit of time, she let out a sigh and turned towards me.

"Arc, there's a separating line down the middle, this side is ours and that side is yours!"

A blush could clearly be seen on her lilac skin as she pulled Chiome to their side of the room and pointed out the boundary line

Chiome gave Ariane a strange look but nevertheless remained silent.

She didn't seem to have the same issue about sharing a room as Ariane did. Maybe it was because the "Blade Heart Clan" was male dominated and she just was used to this type of situation, or she could have still had the mindset of a

young child.

Ariane was a warrior within elven society, another male dominated the field and should have been used to this type of thing as well, but she reacted to it like an innocent maiden.

Was her normally dignified composure and current behavior the so-called gap moe?

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Meanwhile, Ponta paid the boundary line no heed as she ran around the cabin and let out joyful cries when she caught a whiff of something she liked.

After a few minutes, I felt the ship shake and a look out of the porthole revealed that scenery had started to change.

We’d just set sail.

Chapter 05: Chat with Danka

“Well, let’s enjoy our next four days at sea.”

After placing my baggage beside the bed I was assigned, I took a seat.

Ponta immediately climbed on my knee and began vigorously wagging her tail.

She must be after the yakitori.

“We just set sail, didn’t we? Wait just a little bit longer. How about we take a stroll around the ship?”

“Kyun....., Kyun!”

Ponta made a sad face and her tail drooped when I refused to give her what she wanted, but she perked up at the proposal of exploration.

Picking up Ponta by the scruff of her neck, I was almost out the door when Ariane demanded my attention.

“Arc, be sure to knock before you enter! Got it!?”

“I understand, no need to raise a commotion.”

After reassuring Ariane, Ponta and I set about exploring the ship.

“Hmm, not even living under the same roof in Raratoia brought about this kind of change.”

I couldn’t get Ariane’s strange behavior out of my head as I walked down a corridor.

Nowadays, the only people that try to create the lucky pervert situation from manga were elementary school dropouts.

While i was thinking about this no-win situation, I finally reached the deck .

The harbor had already vanished from sight and the ship was heading straight into the vast western sea.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

After leaping onto the ship’s railing, Ponta began to smile as the sea breeze blew through her green fur.

As I was watching Ponta, I suddenly heard a voice from behind me.

“Is it true that you’ve joined Raratoia?”

Looking back to see who’d begun a conversation without a greeting, I saw an elf I recognized standing behind me.

“It’s been a while, Danka-dono.”

“Kyun!”

Danka paid Ponta no mind and silently stared at me.

“Hmm, you seem to have already heard about my circumstances. With Dylan’s permission I’ve been allowed to take up the name Raratoia.

Danka raised an eyebrow after I said that.

“You said you were a human before. However, from the story I heard, you’ve been accepted by the village elder as representative of a new elven tribe. What does that mean?”

I did remember introducing myself as a human when we first met.

Back then, I hadn’t been trying to lie. After all, and how was I to know that my skeletal body would turn into one of the in-game dark elves.

“At the time, I believed myself to be human. My memory is a bit faulty and I didn’t remember who I was.”

The wrinkles on Danka’s face deepened and suspicion could be seen creeping into his eyes.

“Stop speaking nonsense. Even if you lost your memories your race should have been obvious. What in the world are you hiding?”

Danks’s cross-examination was heading into dangerous territory.

Regarding my special appearance, Dylan said it would be premature to reveal it to the others members of the village and suggested I gradually built up their familiarity with me before I show it to them.

Ariane and a few others had been able to see my skeletal form and be convinced that I was person afterward, but every additional piece of elven society I learned made me doubtful of others having a similar reaction.

Even if they were all elves, clear divides and strife existed between their groups.

My first impression of the elves was that they united due to their small numbers, but I realized that they weren’t all that different from humans.

Someone who’d I helped rescue kidnapped elves with now looked upon me with suspicion in his eyes.

As a warrior tasked with protecting his people we were wary of someone’s whose abilities and identity was unknown.

However, I hadn’t expected this type of situation.

“My body is under a certain curse..... and my normal appearance is vastly different from other races. Dylan, my village elder, has forbidden these from being discussed in public, so you’ll have to ask him about it.”

I looked Danko in the eye and told him what Dylan said I should if questioned about my body.

Ponta had been watching our exchange jumped on my shoulder from the railing and began wagging her puffy tail in front of my face, blocking my vision.

“Hey, Ponta. I can’t see.”

“Kyun!”

She'd probably done it as a way to ease the tension because as soon as I complained Ponta stopped and wrapped herself around my neck.

A slight smirk appeared on Danka's face as he watched the scene unfold before turning on his heel.

“.....Don't betray her trust, Arc”

Danka returned below deck after saying that.

With 'her', he must have meant Ariane.

Aside from anything involving me, he should be seeing Ariane as a friend he was on good terms with, so this whole affair must have been his way of warning me.

Once I saw Danka's back disappear, I let out a relieved sigh and looked towards the sea.

For a while, I watched the sea for a bit, but I eventually got bored of it and started to watch the sailors work while enjoying the sea breeze flowing over my body.

Eventually, Ponta let out a yawn and scratched the back of her ears with her hind legs.

“Let's head back inside.”

“Kyun!”

Ponta was delighted by the suggestion of returning to the cabin.

When I reached our cabin, I opened the door..... without knocking first.

Ariane was in the middle of removing her usual leather armor and was relaxing on her bed, while Chiome had removed her greaves and her upper chest was exposed.

Though her figure didn't imply that she needed it, Chiome wore some type of undergarment under her regular outfit.

All of us were silent for a moment before I closed the door as the pillow Ariane throw came flying at me.

However, I could still hear Ariane scolding me from inside the room.

..... I'd completely forgotten about room etiquette after speaking with Danka.

Being criticized by Ariane about this wasn't something I found all that lucky in the slightest.

This was a bad impression to set on the first day out at sea.

I'll need to be on my best behavior to prevent this from happening again.

Besides that nothing else noteworthy occurred today.

Chapter 06: Transfer Record

After four days on the ship, the rescue party reached Doranto's coastline in the Rouen Forest.

Based on what I could make out from the ship's deck, Rouen lacked the massive trees of Great Canada Forest.

As the ship gently settled near the coast, I could see that there was a sandy beach between the sea and the actual forest.

Several long piers that extended into the sea had been built along the sandy beach.

Only small fishing boats were anchored to those piers, and the arrival of our magic tool powered ship caught the fishermen's attention.

Even from this far out I could see they all had the green-tinted blonde hair and long ears of normal elves. They also wore the same traditional clothes the villagers in Canada wore.

It must have been deemed impossible for the ship to go any further inland since we dropped anchor a little bit away from the closest pier, while a small boat was prepared to be lowered into the water.

Dylan and several of the warriors under his command boarded the boat and sailed towards the coastline after being lowered into the water.

"Until Dylan-dono returns with permission from the elder, we won't be allowed to dock."

I held my hand to my forehead and kept an eye on the small boat while talking with Ariane next to me.

She was following my example and blocking the sunlight with her hand while narrowing her eyes to watch Dylan interact with the elves that came to greet him.

“They aren’t being very welcoming about this whole affair.”

With her enhanced visual prowess as a dark elf, Ariane was capable of making out what was happening on the coast, she even muttered her displeasure about it in a hushed tone.

Next to her, Chiome observed the coast before asking a question.

“Is it normal that there’s very little contact with Doranto??”

“I guess, from what I hear we trade maybe once every four or five years.....”

The thought of the intervals between the Olympics crossed my mind as I folded my arms.

It was trade in name only, a token exchange meant to maintain the status quo.

“Canada is firmly against a purely elven society, and this group is too prideful to join forces with other races.....”

Ariane’s words were laced with barely contained anger, but I asked her about something that bothered me.

“Speaking of other races, are there others besides the dark elves involved in this?”

Ariane gave me a questioning glance when I asked her that question.

“Ah, since you’ve officially become a villager I guess you’ll learn about it eventual, Arc.”

I nodded in response to her vague answer.

Based on her reaction, I could guess that the Great Canada Forest was allied with powers I was unaware of.

At the moment, I was aware that elves and dark elves were the main residents of Great Canada Forest, with beastmen involved in trade having temporary stays.

I’ve never seen any other races, but they could live in villages in the eastern regions.

While I was lost in thought, there was movement around Dylan's landing party.

Several people appeared from the forest and exchanged greetings with Dylan once they reached the pier the boat was moored to.

The elves that arrived were probably the leaders around here.

A male elf surrounded by guards stepped forward and gave the small boat and our ship a once over before shaking hands with Dylan.

One of the people Dylan took with him started making hand signals towards the ship, causing the crew to jump into action.

"Permission has been given! Begin preparations for landfall! We don't have enough boats so we'll be making round trips!"

The crew members sprung into action as soon as the commands were given.

As instructed, the twenty members of the relief team, the sailors in charge of resource replenishment and the baggage were transported to the pier.

However, when we reached the pier I heard the harsh voice of one of the village warriors.

"You don't have permission to enter the village! Don't stray too far from here!"

Another warrior cast his gaze over us and proceeded to snort and arrogantly talked down at us.

"Not only a dark elf, those from Canada even brought a beast along....."

His words seeped in contempt and Ariane started emitting a dangerous aura.

"You, in the metal armor, show your face!"

The man's shout echoed through the area and naturally attracted everyone's attention.

I obliged to his demand, to Ponta's dismay since she'd been sitting on my helmet, and revealed my face.

“Kyun!”

“What? Just what are you?”

The man grimaced as he took in my crimson eyes, brown skin, and black hair.

As a precaution, I drank the restorative water which I had collected from the spring near the Dragon King’s Tree before we landed.

“The three of us will be entering the Salma Kingdom through the forest, may we pass?”

While putting my helmet back on I informed them of our intentions, but he frowned and gave me an exaggerated shoulder shrug.

“That is not allowed! To allow outsiders to enter Rouen forest——”

Dylan, who’d been watching the scene unfold, said a few words and the village elder sent a messenger to whisper something into the warrior’s ear.

The warrior who had been giving us trouble ‘til now turned on his heel and muttered curses under his breath as he walked away. Dylan seems to have settled the matter somehow.

The messenger who just arrived looked back towards his leaders and waited until he nodded before he opened his mouth.

“The elders have granted you permission to traverse the forest. By taking the road on the other side of the coast, you should reach the human territory in half a day. While you can enter the forest, permission to enter the village has not been granted.”

Having completed his task, the man turned around and returned to his place next to Dylan.

Dylan gave us one last look before he and the relief team were escorted to the village.

After Chiome and I offered him a slight bow, I tried to plan out our course of action with Ariane, but she was still looking in the direction the warrior walked

off in.

“Ariane-dono, since permission has been granted we should leave immed—”

“What was with that attitude!? Why do the elders support people like that!?”

Ariane’s outraged shout and foot stomping cut off what I was trying to say.

Chiome let out a small sigh beside me.

“Everything’s alright as long as we can pass through the forest.”

I nodded in agreement with her statement.

After being stuck on that cramped ship I’d like to get going as soon as possible.

Though it was possible to secretly slip through the forest using Dimensional Step, the problem was not knowing how long that would take, so the official help was appreciated.

“We should get going” “Alright” “Yes”

“Kyun!”

Ariane, Chiome, and Ponta all responded to my suggestion.

Since we’d be entering the human territory, Chiome took out an oversized hat to hide her cat ears and hid her tail inside the inconspicuous clothes she was wearing, while Ariane put on the gray cloak she wore whenever we snuck into human towns.

Once preparations were complete, we headed down the path the messenger had pointed out a while ago.

The path rose along a gentle hill before long and three massive trees which soared into the sky came into view.

Spiraling staircases had been carved into the trees trunk, and while not as dignified as the Dragon King’s tree, they still towered over the average trees in the Great Canada Forest.

A town had been built between the roots of these massive trees.

That was probably the village.

There were a few differences between it and Canada's villages. The wall that surrounded the town village was built from wood and stone.

From here, the buildings looked similar to those of human towns.

While the trees gave the village an overwhelming aura, the walls of Canada villages were defiantly taller than the ones around Doranto.

I could see a group of people heading towards the village from here. It must have been the relief team.

Ariane looked down at the village with dissatisfaction before suddenly turning towards me.

"By the way, Arc. When did you collect the hot spring water? I was a bit surprised when you showed your face back there....."

"Ah, that."

Recalling that exchange, I reached into my bag and took out a booklet of paper held together by string.

"I committed the cabin layout to memory and then drew it on this."

I began turning the pages of the booklet for Ariane as I spoke. Chiome's ears twitched as she looked at booklet as well.

"This is what you bought from the vendor in Landfria back then.You copied the interior of the cabin with it."

A near photographic replication of the cabin was drawn on the piece of paper they were looking at.

It was a scene for an early morning aboard the ship.

My long distance transfer magic Transfer Gate was only limited by my ability to recreate the location I wished to travel to from memory.

This meant that I had difficulties transferring to non-distinctive locations, or places I've never been. Regular rooms left thin impressions on a person and weren't all that memorable, making it impossible for them to clear the transfer condition.

While exceptions exist for rooms a person lives in for an extended amount of time, not a lot of people remember the layout of the hotel room they stayed in once.

In order to keep important locations clear, I created this booklet to keep track of places I can transfer to as we traveled.

Currently the booklet contained every location I've visited so far, and I'd be able to transfer all over the world as my travels continued.

As I imagined my future traveling plans, Ariane's golden eye widened for some reason and she snatched the booklet out of my hands.

"Arc! This! Is that me!?"

Ariane pointed out her own gently sleeping figure in the cabin drawing as I spoke.

"Yes, it was a pleasure to draw a beautiful woman, what do you think?"

I puffed out my chest in pride of my work, but she opened and shut her mouth several times like she was struggling on what to say before violently shoving the booklet back to me.

"It's nothing special....."

While Ariane ears took on a vermillion hue Chiome gave the drawing another once over and muttered something.

".....I was asleep on the top bunk, so only my tail is visible."

Chiome seemed saddened by that fact and Ponta hit my helmet in protest.

Because the drawing was from the point of view of the bed I slept on, Ponta was not in it since she slept on the same bed.

The next time I stopped to draw out a transfer location, I'd be sure to include Ponta in it.

“Before we enter the human territory, can I have an hour or two for myself? I'd like to draw this location as well.”

On the off chance we may have to return to this place, the ability to instantly get here with transfer magic would be a great help.

While Doranto was distinctive on its own and shouldn't be that hard to remember, but enough time away from here would cause my memory to fade..... a bit of insurance would help.

There might be some benefit in including this location on my list.

“I understand. It'll be troublesome getting wrapped up in this, so do it somewhere away from here.”

Both Chiome and Ariane agreed to my request and resumed our trek.

Chapter 07: Immediately Walking into Trouble

It was rather easy to draw the scenery, so my work was progressing smoothly.

“I’m quite good at this.”

Satisfied self-praise slipped from my mouth as I compared Doranto village behind us to the drawing I’d made of it. I heard Ariane yawn beside me just as she glances over at my work.

“So, are you done?”

After wiping some tears from the corner of her eyes, she stood up and stretched before brushing the dust off her firm backside.

Chiome leaped off the nearby large tree she had climbed a while ago to keep watch.

“Are we departing?”

She was confused and gave me a questioning look when I lightly shook my head no at her question. I waved my hand and quickly explained myself.

“We’ll set off soon, just wait a moment.”

After I said that, I stepped away from the two of them and prepared to activate my long-distance transfer magic Transfer Gate.

Ponta immediately ran up, leaped into the air, and gracefully landed on her spot on top of my helmet.

When the magic formation completed itself at my feet, everything went black for a moment before I arrived at the location from my memory.

Looking up I saw the large tree spreading over the sky, with sunlight managing to pass through the gaps in the tree’s enormous canopy. It was the Dragon King’s Tree. I was standing a little bit away from a residence in need of

renovation.

I let out a relieved sigh upon seeing nothing had changed since the last time I was here before raising my voice.

“Haaay, Shiden! Come out if you’re there!”

I shouted towards the forest and Ponta soon let out cries of her own despite having been quiet ‘til now.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Whether it was because of my shouting or Ponta’s call I didn’t know..... but our mount pushed through the undergrowth and revealed itself.

Shiden had been watching the residence up till now.

When he saw Ponta and me, Shiden let out a joy filled cry and came running straight into us.

“Gyiiiiiin”

Being on the receiving end of Shiden’s full strength caused my feet to dig into the ground before he was stopped.

Although it was playfulness on Shiden’s part, that collision would have been the same as being hit by a small truck if I had been a normal person.

He may have been a gift from the tiger tribe, but considerable strength was needed to properly care for him.

While he looked like a proud and powerful small dragon, I couldn’t deny a strange sense of charm in the way he acted.

“Kyun! Kyun”

When Ponta called out to Shiden from the top my head, he shook his white mane and growled in response. I felt the corners of my mouth rise as I watched the friendly exchange.

“You seem to have gotten used to living here, but it must be stifling having to

stay on this mountain. How about we go on a little excursion? It has been a while since you could run to your heart's content."

I stroked Shiden's mane before retrieving the saddle from the residence and attaching it to him as quickly as I could. Shiden shook his head once, scratched the ground with his hoof and snorted to let me that he understood what I said.

I patted Shiden's neck to soothe him before climbing aboard and casting Transfer Gate. Everything went dark for a moment before Ariane came into view.

"Kya!!"

The moment we appeared, Ariane stumbled and fell on her backside when Shiden's massive figure materialized in front of her.

When she realized what was going on, she glared at me.

"Hey, say something if you're gonna bring him along! Hmph....."

She normally didn't scream in such a feminine manner, but she'd been caught off guard and threw her complaints at me.

"Arc-dono, are we riding Shiden into the human country?"

Chiome asked me that expected question as she approached Shiden massive form.

"This guy needs to run in an open area once and awhile. Besides, we shouldn't attract too much attention when we cross into human territory."

The inhabitable area for humans was extremely limited in this world.

There were plenty of sources of fresh water and land suitable for crop cultivation, but in this monster-ridden world, most humans lived in walled-off settlements.

There wasn't much humans could do to expand beyond the fields set up outside their walls, so even within their own territory the limits of the human gaze was surprisingly narrow.

At least, that was the impression I got after visiting a few human towns in this world. Shiden wasn't as large as a Dragon King, and given his speed we would be inconspicuous as long as we kept our distance from human settlements.

Besides, the land mass the Hiruku Theocracy and its three neighboring nations exceeded Rhoden in size.

With Shiden's strength and speed, we could pave our way through the slightly forested areas and cover the distance with little issue.

Chiome seemed to understand this and patted Shiden's snout.

"Thanks in advance."

Shiden let out a large snort in response to her words.

"We should exit the forest before the villagers bother us again."

Despite her previous complaints, Ariane strapped her baggage to Shiden's saddle and urged us to do the same. Chiome and I agreed with that sentiment, and I grasped Shiden's reins to turn him in the right direction.

"Let's get going."

Ariane jumped into the saddle behind me while Chiome settled in in front of me.

"Kyun!!"

Ponta gave the starting signal from within Shiden's white mane, making him start running without any input from me.

Shiden increased his speed instantly, weaving through the narrow paths the trees made and trampling everything else with sheer momentum. Occasionally we would run through a series of low-hanging tree branches, but Chiome was too small to be affected by it, and the branches would just snap off when they collided with my armor.

Ariane simply crouched down and used my body as a shield to avoid them.

"Wahahahahahah!"

The thrill of rough riding through Rouen forest overwhelmed me and my laughter started to leak from my helmet. To any bystander, an eerie laughter would accompany the huge figure of the forest clearing dangerous monster. While I was considering such things, the trees had begun to thin out and a break in the forest appeared ahead of us.

Even in a forest, Shiden was able to run as fast as a car so we cleared it faster than anticipated. Not even an hour had passed since we started riding Shiden.

An area composed of gentle hills laid in the horizon once we left the forest. I pulled Shiden's reins and brought him to a stop in order to take a look around.

"The forest was surprisingly shallow. By any chance, was it a narrow section?"

Chiome looked up from between my arms and the reins to ask the question while I looked at the forest behind us and the hills in front of us.

"Well, we passed through the forest but we can't retrace Sasuke-dono's footsteps in such a vast land..... is there any problem with simply entering the Hiruku Theocracy?"

After muttering my suggestion to Chiome she thought it over for a moment before nodding in agreement.

"We can gather information in the human towns along the way."

"Let's mark the Hiruku Theocracy as our final destination for now. We can't afford to be careless with matters surrounding Sasuke-dono, but nothing will get done if we just stay here."

Chiome's opinion barely changed as we settled our plan of action from here on out.

Even with all that out of the way, I was left confused after looking left and right.

"Which direction do we go to reach the Hiruku Theocracy....."

Ariane then spoke up and asked a question when she heard my murmur.

"Chiome-chan, the Hiruku Theocracy is west of Delfuente Kingdom, right?"

Since we came from the southern shore, shouldn't we head northwest?"

Her deduction was logical and my directionally challenged self had no room to doubt what she said. Once I turned Shiden in the direction she had pointed out, we resumed our journey.

The rolling, grassy hills were stomped into clouds of debris as the six-legged dragon mount ran across them.

The majestic scenery seemed almost unending as we quietly traveled.

Chiome, who'd been looking straight ahead the entire trip, noticed something as she looked up at me and started shouting.

"Arc-dono! Mounted horsemen are fleeing from a spider-like undead to the right!"

When I looked in the direction Chiome pointed out, I caught a sight of several horses running in the distance.

A female rider was near the front and there was a girl sitting between her arms in a similar fashion to us. The other riders were men wearing suits of armor. I realized that the men were in a protective formation behind the horse the little girl was riding on just as the monster came into view.

Its lower body was that of a huge spider, while its upper body consisted of two fused-together human chests, each set of arms holding a weapon and shield, and despite its appearance it managed to keep pace with the horses.

In broad daylight, a scene straight out of a B horror movie played out in front of me, but it must have been a nightmare for those being chased.

"What luck! Our next clue has just showed up over there!"

With only a jerk of the reins, Shiden changed direction and followed the monster.

He was a smart mount.

"We'll help the people it's chasing and then ask them about the monster's

origins!”

“Yes!” “Understood!”

After Chiome and Ariane voiced their agreement Shiden poured more power into his six legs and rocketed forward, rapidly shortening the distance between us by the moment.

Chapter 08: Something Creeps Up (Part 1)

Eastern Salma Kingdom.

The Sobiru Mountains separated the Kingdoms of Salma and Nozan.

The Uiru river east of the mountain range flew into southern sea, the land that had once belonged to Nozan, but was currently a part of Salma Kingdom.

As of now, a Salman noble governed the land, Lord Burnett had proven himself in securing this land from Nozan and now governed it.

There was a distinct lack of settlements and farmland along the main highway that ran through the gentle rolling hills of the Burnett territory.

A single carriage advanced down the road in a fast trot.

The carriage wasn't all that extravagant, it only had the bare minimum of functionality, making the excellent physique of the four horses tied to it more apparent.

Since few people made use of them, pebbles and stones of various sizes littered the road, causing the carriage to constantly rattle and shake.

Ten horsemen escorted ran parallel to the carriage.

Given the quality of the armor they wore and the swords strapped to their waist, one could immediately tell that the riders at the reins of the horses were knights

The Knight's coat of arms identified them as one of the groups that escaped the Nozan's capital and the occupant of the carriage was none other than Princess Lille.

Although they had crossed into another kingdom's territory, for the sake of speed and discretion, a flag bearing the royal crest hadn't been raised.

At the head of the group were a man and a woman wearing better armor than

those around them, princess Lille's personal guards.

One was Nina, the Knight. Her long, raven-black hair was braided into three knots, her hard slated eyes and tanned skin did little to detract from her feminine charm.

She voiced her dissatisfaction about the current situation to the large companion next to her.



“We left the capital two days ago. In our rush to get here we even switched out horses, yet as soon as we entered Salma we lowered our speed, shouldn’t we get to Dimo Earldom as quickly as possible?”

Nina’s fellow personal guard, Zahar quietly listened to her complaints with a thoughtful expression on his face.

With his expressionless face, short chestnut hair, large physique, his quiet demeanor gave Zahar an air of intimidation.

“We’re already in hostile territory. We can’t stop and switch out exhausted horses like before. If we pushed our horses to their limits we would be able to reach our destination quickly. However, all that would be meaningless if they collapse halfway there.”

Nina let out a large sigh as she was forced to accept their current situation after hearing his detailed reply.

At their current pace, they could probably reach the earldom in half a day or so.

As he’d said, it would be wasteful if the horses ran to exhaustion, forcing them to traverse the forest as a result.

Even though she knew that going at this pace was the right decision, innumerable undead had descended upon the capital, but the threat of being discovered in a hostile country made a leisure advance nerve wrecking.

Nina shook her head once, and pulled on her reins to match the speed of Princess Lille’s carriage.

When she noticed this, Lille opened the window and asked Nina a question.

“Is something wrong, Nina? Did something happen?”

Lille was a little confused by one of her personal guards suddenly slowing down, and she looked upon Nina with innocent curiosity,

Nina shook her head before answering.

“No, Princess Lille. Has the long journey not tired you out?”

Lille’s childish expression vanished with a shake of her head.

“The capital is facing a major crisis, I can not whine about such little things!”

The escort riding nearby choked up at the princess’s words.

Despite only being ten years old, she clenched her small fist in dedication to the task the King gave her and spoke up again.

“Nina, tell Zahar we need to reach the Dimo Earldom as soon as possible.”

Nina nodded her the Princess’s wish and tighten her hold on the reins in preparation to spare her horse ahead.

However, the tense voice of one of the rear escorts reached her ears before she could act.

“Enemy at the rear! It’s a Spider monstrosity!!”

Nina looked back and looked for spider monster the escort had spoken of.

She didn’t have to search for long as the deformed ghoul openly crossed the hilly landscape behind them.

Two human heads set atop a muscular torso, a set of arms grow from its back, giving the creature a total of four arms, and the lower body of a giant spider.

The spider monster had discolored skin over the visible human portion of its body, wore armor, carried swords clearly made by human hands, a shield on its back and yet it still managed to silently chase after the carriage.

The horrifying figure convinced Nina that it was one of the abominations she heard about in the scout report a few days ago.

Naturally, questions began to form in her mind.

In this world, the existence of undead was well known, and while they didn’t spring forth all that often, it wasn’t a rare occurrence either.

It was common practice to cremate the dead as a precautionary measure, limiting the number of people that turned into undead.

The innumerable horde of undead that were laying siege to Nozan Kingdom's capital Souria were evidently moving according to someone's instructions.

Furthermore, there was no reason for such a large number of undead to spontaneously appear, and they were all even bringing their own identical metal equipment for the assault.

There were legends of an evil creature that the undead were subservient to, traveling minstrels even sung of it, but could the current events and said legends be related?

Nina shook those thoughts out of her head and galloped to catch up with Zahar in the front.

Now was not the time to let mere suspicions seize her heart.

"Zahar! One of the spider monsters has appeared! The Princess's carriage is our priority!"

Zahar turned his horse around when he heard what Nina said.

"Nina! You stick to the carriage and defend it! The four rearguards follow me! We'll engage the monster!!"

Zahar's soft-spoken persona had been replaced with a man shouting at the top of his lungs, the four guards he singled out immediately followed his lead.

Seen yoooouu, insects!!!

The deformed spider monster let out a disturbing voice from its two mouths as it focused its uneven gaze on Zahar's group as they quickly approached it.

Zahar and the four guards drew their swords in response and hastened their pace toward the monstrosity.

Zahar, who had earned his knighthood through his own strength, lead the imperial guards who were normally tasked with protecting the royal family.

The escort unit was composed of the most valorous of people and those following Zahar fearlessly spread themselves out in an attempt to surround the monster.

However, contrary to its deformed appearance, the monster was capable of recognizing a disadvantageous situation as it crouched down and took a massive leap over the heads of the enclosing cavalry with its unbelievably strong spider leg.

“Hah!? Fuck!! Everyone reverse direction!!”

A leap such as that was beyond Zahar’s exceptions, he let out a curse as he yanked at the reins to turn his horse around.

Setting its sight on the carriage, the spider monster shifted the bulk of its body forward before it leaped into the sky once more.

Princess Lille stuck her head out the carriage window only for tears to appear in the corner of her eyes as she saw the monster approaching. On the verge of crying, she shouted for the person she depended on the most.

“W-What is that thing!? N-Nina, it’s coming this way!!”

Nina’s responded to her screams by pulling her horse next to the carriage and pulling Lille’s small body out the window.

“Nina!!”

“Princess! Hold on to me so you don’t fall off!!”

Moments after the princess had been pulled out of the window, debris was sent flying as the spider monster landed on the carriage with enough force to utterly wreck it.

The landing created a deafening shockwave that knocked down the four horses which had been pulling the carriage, the sudden fall snapping their legs and necks.

Half of the coachman’s body had been crushed and red blotches covered the ground around him.

Once Nina had settled Princess Lille in the saddle, she set off at a full gallop, only looking back at the monster to investigate once the dust had cleared.

RaoaaaAAaaaaaaaAAr!!!

The spider monster let out an angered roar as it began hacking at the barely alive horses with one of its massive swords. Once they were all dead, it set both sets of eyes on the fleeing Nina and Princess Lille.

However, Zahar's group had managed to catch up to the monster and unleashed a barrage of attacks.

Unfortunately, the monster's body was not normal and less than half of the attacks left a lasting wound.

Even if only a fraction of Zahar's group's attacks got through, they still managed to injure it.

The spider monster roared in irritation and brandished its weapons at an enemy that was no longer there.

A strong attack meant nothing if it hit nothing.

"We'll kill it here!!"

At his command, the member of Zahar's group turned around once more and raised their weapons again.

The first assault had left a deep cut on one of the monster's leg, throwing it off balance, and the second attack cut into the human section of its body.

AaAAAAAAAAAAAAaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

Black blood sprayed in the monster's general vicinity as it screamed with an agonized roar.

Just as Zahar was about to order another assault, the spider set its sights on Nina once more and started chasing her despite the blood that continued to pour from its injuries.

“Fuck!! It’s after the princess, stop it at any cost!!”

The imperial guardsmen whipped their horses to chase after the spider monster, but the monster swung one of its massive swords at their approach.

Accompanied by a metallic echo, the giant sword became the reaper’s scythe as it reduced two of the pursuing guards into pieces of meat rolling along the ground.

Veins began to bulge along Zahar’s forehead as he ground his teeth upon seeing what became of his subordinates.

Thinking that the wounded monster had become desperate, he’d hastily ordered his subordinates to act..... as a result, the monster managed a lethal counterattack.

That error in judgment made Zahar want to lash out in anger, but this was not the time or place.

He somehow managed to maintain his composure as he tightened his hold on the reins and urged his horse to chase the monster at full speed.

Three of the guards from the group being chased by the monster separated from Nina and Lille and joined the assault on the monster.

The Spider let out an angry roar as the three guards and Zahar’s group joined together.

“Zahar-sama! Nina-sama has sent us to help!”

One of the guards that joined the battle loudly proclaimed their intentions and received a silent nod from Zahar.

Nina’s decision had further reduced the number of Princess Lille’s guards, a risky call to make, but if they couldn’t defeat the monster here and now, her safety couldn’t be assured anyway.

Immediately grasping the situation, Zahar raised his sword along with the other guards.

“Aim for the monster’s legs! The Princess’s chances drastically rise once it loses its leaping ability! Attack as one!!”

The guards let out a spirited shout as they engaged the monster once more.

Nina would occasionally glance back to witness the imperial guards struggling to slay the wounded monster, that decision cost her the awareness of her surroundings.

Neither Nina nor the guards with her immediately noticed what was going on, but Princess Lille had been looking straight ahead and saw what was coming.

“Nina!! To the right!!”

Despite her small body, her voice was clear and direct.

Nina immediately looked in the direction Nina pointed out.

The flat plain had given way to gentle hills, creating a natural blind spot, an easy place to hide from view.

In other words, the perfect location to ambush unsuspecting prey.

Escapees!! God’s orders, eliminate escapees from royal capital!!Escaping!!
Order to Kill those that try to escape!!

This wasn’t the same monster Zahar was fighting, another one brandishing large blunt weapons had leaped out of the hill’s shadow.

The monster’s abrupt appearance momentarily stunned Nina’s higher functions, allowing the deformed spider monster the opportunity to bring its metal weapons down upon them.

“Nina!!!”

Nina’s body moved on reflex when she heard Lille’s shout, but the hammer-like lumps of metal had already blown away the guards that had been beside her.

After avoiding the attack, Nina drew her sword with one hand and planned to launch a counterattack..... however, the spider monster had more than one type

of weapon.

Nina tried to keep her sword between herself and the monster, but one of its large sword suddenly closed in on her before she could dodge, shattering her posture.

The next moment, her right arm still grasping her weapon danced through the air before landing on the ground.

“Uauuuuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

The shock of having her arm cut off was replaced with an intense burning, the accompanying jerking and ruined posture caused her to run her horse into the ground.

Princess Lille was sent tumbling into the grassy hillside, scraping and bruising herself along the way.

“Princess Lille!! Nina!!!!”

Zahar’s normal calmness had vanished as he was stuck watching the hopeless situation play out ahead of him.

The heavily injured spider monster prevented him from advancing.

“Moveee!!! Get out of my wayy!!!”

Zahar’s angry roar caused the surrounding guards to raise the blood soaked weapons once more.

But even if they managed to slay the monster in front of them, there was still a considerable amount of distance between them and princess Lille and Nina.

Nozan Kingdom, eliminate human!!!

An unsettling voice left the monster lips as it gleefully rolled a moaning Nina over with its foot and raised its weapons once more.

Princess Lille started wailing as she was forced to watch the was to come.

“NO! Noo! Ninaa!!!”

However, the monster didn't bring it's sword down on Nina.

Just as it was about to do the deed a loud rumbling caused the entire hill to start shaking. The Spider monster looked around with its two heads..... when it suddenly appeared.

Chapter 09: Something Creeps Up (Part 2)

The being that appeared in the valley between the hills was larger than the spider monsters.

Its whole body was covered in reddish-brown scales, two massive horn stuck out from its head, and a white mane grew from its back.

At the same time the majestic creature appeared in the valley, the sound of an intense clash rang out as something penetrated the spider monster which had raised its weapons.

Two large holes with a set of white horns filling them appeared within the monster's now dark, liquid-leaking abdomen.

Perhaps it was the monster's bodily fluids, but in any case, the monster's voice trembled with anger.

Whooooooo!!? Kill witnesssssss!!!

A viscous liquid sprayed from the monster's mouth as it raised its weapons..... towards the three people sitting upon a saddle with an unique design that was strapped to the creature's back.

“Ariane-dono, Chiome-dono, please take care of the other one.”

This was the only thing the armored Knight riding in the middle of the trio said to his companions.

His full-body armor, with its white and blue undertones and detailed patterns etched into it, was befitting of a knight from legend. A jet black mantle inlaid with a pattern seemingly cut from the night sky hung from his shoulder.

He drew a sword, whose blue blade was surrounded by a pale aura, and took hold of an elaborately decorated circular shield.

A small animal with green fur, which let out a cry for some reason as it was

wagging its tail, sat atop the dignified knight's head.

The people responded to the Silver Knight's statement by climbing off of what must have been a mount.

One of them, still a young girl, wore an oversized hat over her dark black hair. A dagger was strapped to her waist and her arms and legs were covered by gauntlets.

The other was a tall woman.

Her entire body was covered by a gray cloak, but the rich curves of her mature body were still visible.

The two women drew their weapons and rushed towards the monster Zahar's group had been fighting at a staggering speed that surpassed that of ordinary men.



Flames appeared around the tall woman's body and swirled around her as if it had a will of its own before snaking around her sword.

Mixed in with the heat radiating off of her was the sound of chants escaping from her lips. The flames around her blade grew stronger before she dealt a crippling blow to the monster.

The flames spread from the point of contact and engulfed the spider monster's entire body, mercilessly burning the creature from within and filling the air with a horrid stench.

Aghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!

The small girl also dealt a blow to the wailing monster.

After chanting something and a series of hand signs, two wolves composed of water appeared by her side.

Additionally, a white pillar surrounded her dagger, and an arc started to trail behind her dagger as she sliced into the monster's body in rapid succession.

The injured spider monster tried to defend itself, but the water wolves created by the girl neutralized all of its attempts

If the monster tried to distance itself, its legs were bitten. If it tried to raise a weapon, its arm was bitten.

Zahar and the other guards were left dumbfounded as they watched the spectacle unfold.

From Zahar's perspective, it was clear that the sword arms of the two women were refined to a considerable degree.

The destructive power of the spider monster was still a considerable threat, but the two of them were more skillful in their craft, allowing them to easily take advantage of the large openings in the monster's offense.

Eventually, the monster's entire body was withered away by fire and water, its feeble legs collapsing under its own weight, and its body disintegrating as if it

had been a bad dream.

Away from the achievements of his companions, the silver knight swung his divine blade in a casual manner.

“Flying Dragon Slash!”

The knight muttered something in a low tone as the swing of his swing blade kicked up a gust of wind..... and sent an arc of light flying towards the spider monster.

The slash easily cut through the trees behind the monster at a waist-high level..... the monstrosity narrowly dodged the attack, but the injuries it received from the mount’s charge must have hindered its movements, because some of its legs got caught in the attack.

That single, amazing slash had managed to destroy the monster’s balance.

Ahghhhha!! Ahahhhhhhhha!!

The deformed monster howled in agony as bloodlust against the silver knight consumed its eyes.

“A-Amazing.....”

“Ohhhh.....”

Princess Lille and her personal guard Nina, the witnesses of this battle, were caught off guard by the stranger’s power.

Against the now immobilized monster, the silver knight raised his sword and shield to engage it in direct combat.

Sparks flew and unnerving clangs resounded as heavy weapons clashed with one another.

The monster made use of its four arms to strike the moment the sword clashed with one of its weapons.

However, the knight was able to read those movements and repel each attack

with the circular shield in his left hand, thrusting with his sword two or three times whenever an opening presented itself.

Although the knight's swordsmanship was a bit rough in some areas, there was enough destructive force behind his blows to overwhelm any cheap tricks, as that previous attack had demonstrated.

The spider monster was not to be underestimated either, as one of its missed attacks with one of its hammers gouged out the ground it connected with.

Even if one wielded a tower shield with both hands, a regular person would be crushed under the weight of such a blow.

However, any onlooker could see that its opponent was an unprecedented monster as well.

There was no room for those of human strength to enter the battle between existences which surpassed human comprehension.

The knight and the spider monster repeated their exchange several times, and every time the numbers of wounds on the monster would increase.

Realizing his inevitable defeat, the monster simply threw away the notion of defense.

Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!

However, the knight was undeterred by its desperate attacks, simply readying his sword once more.

Stone Fangs!

The spell the knight used took effect immediately, with stone spikes rising from the ground and impaling the monster's body, temporarily stalling his opponent.

"Sword of Sacred Lightning!!"

The knight took advantage of the momentary distraction to utter another magic word.

A blue electric aura surrounded the blade of the knight's sword, doubling its length just as the knight stabbed the monster through its chest.

Black blood gushed out as the glowing blade rose through the monster's upper body without any resistance, bisecting it with relative ease.

Like a puppet with its strings cut, the spider monster fell to the ground before disintegrating.

“.....There is no way for them to just stumble across something like that.”

The silver knight muttered to himself as he glanced at what remained of his fallen enemy, before sheathing his sword once the aura faded.

He then set his eyes upon the collapsed Nina and the injured Lille.

“Nina!! Princess!!”

Zahar, who had desperately struggled against the other spider monster before now rushed to this location only to find Nina laying in a pool of blood forming around her missing arm and the dumbstruck Lille beside her.

The princess, finally grasping the situation at hand, crawled her way towards Nina's side, who was on the verge of dying.

“Nina! Stay with me, Nina!!”

“Prin..... Princess Lille, It's okay..... you are safe.....”

Seeing Nina's face twisted in pain caused warm tears to roll down Lille's cheeks.

“Hold on! I'll stop the bleeding! Hey, get me something to wrap the wound!”

When Nina's face started to turn blue he began to shout at the nearby guards while holding down the stump her missing arm.

The guards hastily began to search the area when they received the order, but the knight that defeated the monster a little while ago suddenly interrupted them.

“Excuse me, could you let me pass.....”

The relaxed tone of their supposed benefactor irritated the guards and caused Zahar to give the knight a death glare.

It was impossible to gauge his reaction through the gaps in his visor.

However, he was holding Nina's severed arm and pushed his way through the guards before kneeling beside Zahar.

Lille cried even harder as she watched the knight's behavior.

The Knight poured water from his canteen to clear away the dust from the severed arm and then connected it to the still bleeding stump.

“Ahaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

“!? Bastard!!”

Zahar unintentionally roared in anger as he saw the pain the knight was causing her by messing with her wound.

They had yet to apply a tourniquet to the wound, causing a moment of bewilderment to give way to immediate anger, but the Knight also spoke his mind before uttering another magic word.

“Hold her down, please. Major Heal”

Warm lights surround Nina's wounded arm in response to the word that had slipped from the Knight's mouth and gradually consolidated around the severed section of her arm.

That sparkling light was reflected off of the knight's armor, creating such a fantastic scene that it wasn't hard to imagine him being a holy man.

Princess Lille, Zahar, and the remaining guards were left in a state of silent bewilderment at what was happening before their eyes.

With her remaining bit of consciousness, Nina looked down at her right arm only to witness the severed tissue starting to reconnect itself.

When the lights disappeared, Nina's arm had been reattached without even a scar

to blemish her beautiful skin, as if it had never been cut off in the first place.

Zahar held his breath as he tried to make sense of it all.

He was aware that the knight had used healing magic like a priest, but he still unable to believe what had happened despite seeing it first hand.

The healing magic he'd seen up 'til now could heal shallow cuts and ease swelling. Even the stories he'd heard about famous healers never indicated that they would have been able to reattach a severed arm.

The priest called their feats god's miracle, but that seemed like child's play compared to what he had just seen.

Taken aback by it all, he raised his head and caught sight of the knight's two female companions.

The two of them had watched the entire scene between the Knight and Nina, and while there was admiration in their eyes there wasn't even a hint of surprise in their expression

Perhaps such a thing was commonplace for them.

The thought caused Zahar to shiver.

What purpose could such a being have, one who was capable of easily besting a monster the royal guards struggled against and wielded magic beyond human comprehension?

He then recalled where they were..... this territory had been seized from Nozan Kingdom and rewarded to Lord Burnett for his valor and courage.

There was no way a mere mercenary could acquire a masterpiece-like silver armor like this.

If this person was the right arm of Lord Burnett, then Nozan Kingdom was destined to lose more land in the near future.

Thinking about it such things caused him to audibly swallow his saliva, as the knight looked over Nina's condition without much worry.

“Kyun!”

The strange green animal that had been sitting on the knight’s helmet till now leaped to the ground and ran it’s nose over Nina several times before letting out a cry.

The animal happily wagging its fluffy tail caused all the tension to vanish, letting the toll it all wash over Nina, and leading to her losing consciousness.

Chapter 10: The Person In Charge and The Nonhumans

“Nina!? What’s wrong!? Nina!”

The fallen woman was probably a knight. Once the tension had dissolved, the woman with nice equipment lost consciousness.

Seeing her pass out, the small girl started to cling to her body and calling her name through tear-filled eyes as the women failed to respond.

The collapsed woman’s chest was rising and falling so there shouldn’t be a problem.

“Don’t worry she merely lost consciousness. Her injuries have already been healed with my magic, but she’s lost a lot of blood. It’s for the best that she be allowed to rest.”

When I said that the girl clinging to the female Kni-, Nina raised her head and looked at me.

After I nodded in response, the girl claimed down a little.

Upon a closer look, I could see she had a few cuts and bruises and her beautiful clothes were covered in mud and blood.

Despite that, a faint smile appeared on her face as she looked at the fallen knight.

In a group of people wearing decent body armor, she was the only exception. Considering her age and the fact that I heard Nina say “Princess Lille”.....it was obvious that she was of a high social standing and they were her servants.

“Please hold still.....”

I held my hand in front of the Lille’s small and injured body and invoked another spell.

“Heal”

The soft lights emitted from my hand were absorbed into the cuts and bruises across Lille’s body, and within moments all her injuries had vanished.

“Oh..... that’s amazing!”

Lille’s eyes bulged as she looked over her arms and legs to see that her wounds were gone, her overall surprise caused her to let out an amazed shout.

Next to the girl with the innocent reaction, a large man that had been angry until now was at a loss for words as he looked back and forth between Lille and the sleeping Nina.

When Lille noticed his attitude she pouted and pointed out his behavior out.

“By the way, Zahar. What’s the matter with you? We need to show our gratitude to our benefactors!”

She roughly wiped the tears from her eyes and laughed in a mischievous manner unbefitting of a noble as she spoke.

The knight called Zahar snapped back to reality and immediately took a knee upon seeing her behavior. The other people followed his example and kneeled as well.

“We are truly thankful for your assistance. We——”

Zahan suddenly held his tongue as if he was struggling with what to say next.

Lille spiritedly rose to her feet and puffed up her underdeveloped chest before picking up where he left off.

“My name is Lille Nozan Souria. For certain reasons I am in the midst of a journey, we faced great hardships due to those pursuers, but our lives were spared thanks to your actions. Thank you once again for your efforts.”

Lille had a dignified appearance as she spoke and despite only being around ten, the prideful air of upper-class was permeating her speech.

There was something familiar about the name “Nozan” she used in her introduction.

When I had been in Rhoden Kingdom’s Lanbaltic territory, there had been talks of trade with Nozan Kingdom.

Her name included “Nozan”, and considering the fellows who accompanied her, it was possible that this girl was part of that kingdom’s royal family..... or someone of equivalent status at the very least.

Upon hearing her grand introduction, Zahar’s expression alternated between astonishment and frustration.

The people behind him remained utterly silent, meaning that identifying themselves was detrimental to their cause..... or it was meant to be kept secret.

If I’m not mistaken the closest human territory to the Rouen forest should have been the Salma Kingdom, yet they she still identified herself as “Nozan”.

She seemed to be a royal traveling to a neighboring country with a small escort.

Had they come to the Salma Kingdom as messengers, or as exiles?

Moreover, Lille had spoken of something worrisome.

She had referred to the Spider Chimera as a “pursuer”.

It was possible..... that the monster had been sent to obstruct their way.

While I was buried under a wave of thoughts, Chiome and Ariane had come over and were also thinking about this.

Only Ponta remained unaffected, scratching the back of her ear with her hind leg.

On the other hand, I would hear a groan from Zahar and the other guards as they fruitlessly tried to think of a way to rectify this situation.

However, Lille remained oblivious to all of our reactions and looked up at me with her large bright eyes.

“You all are really strong! Who in the world are you?”

There was only curiosity behind her question, so Ariane, Chiome and I shared a look and a silent nod.

“My name is Arc Raratoia, for our own reason we’re traveling together.”

Ariane and Chiome followed after me with brief introductions of their own.

“Ariane Glenys Raratoia”

“Chiome.”

While we didn’t show the courtesy one was expected to display in the presence of royalty, Lille didn’t seem displeased by it, she just became all the more interested in us.

Behind her, Zahar directed his eyes in our direction.

I do think we said anything that was all that shocking, but could he have discovered our identities by hearing the name of an elven village?

Regardless of my worries, Lille continued speaking.

“Travelers! If you aren’t in a hurry to reach your destination, I would like for you to join my guard detail, or is that no good? If it’s about a reward, then simply name your price.”

“!? Please wait, Princess!”

It was the escorts behind her, not us, who were the most shocked by Lille abrupt proposal.

Zahar hurriedly voiced his objection.

For the people tasked with the protection of someone’s life, seeing the job being offered to someone else would certainly be disheartening, especially if it was a person you just met.

However, Lille stopped his complaints with a wave of her small hands.

“We are passing through Salma Kingdom on our way to the Dimo Earldom. It’s not that my life is all that valuable, I must state our appeal to the earl, least the people of my kingdom’s capital are killed by those disgusting monsters!”

She grasped her small hand into a fist as she spoke.

Lille was but a little girl, yet there was sincerity in her words. It may have been because of noblesse oblige, but a spark of admiration rose up in me.

Zahar’s expression became clouded as he watched Lille’s behavior.

They seemed to have entered Salma Kingdom without permission.

Well, we had no moral obligation to call them out on it. After all, the borders of this world weren’t all that well defended and taking armed guards while crossing a foreign country was a precautionary measure.

Reaching the Dimo Earldom seemed to be their objective, and Lille’s attitude suggested that passing through Salma Kingdom was a necessity. From what she said, it was a place she could acquire the reinforcements needed in her country’s capital.

That raised to question of who exactly Earl Dimo was.

When I glanced at Chiome, she understood what I wanted to know, sadly her reply was a slight head shake. Chiome didn’t know who this Dimo person was either.

However, people being killed by monsters couldn’t be ignored.

The monsters must have been the same as the undead Spider Chimera we dealt with.

A great power had started to move the undead in earnest.

The only suspect was the Hiruku Theocracy.....

Considering what we knew, I cast a hesitant glance in Ariane’s direction, who let out a sigh and shrugged her shoulder in turn.

Her golden eyes were as placid as usual beneath her gray cloak's hood.

I then whispered my idea into Chiome's ear.

"Alright."

After getting her opinion on the matter, I faced Lille's group and slowly removed my helmet.

"It's an elf!"

"Elves!? From the Rouen forest!?"

When he saw my black hair, brown skin, crimson eyes and pointed ears Zahar paled as he immediately judged I was a Rouen Forest elf.

Before confronting the Spider Chimera I drank some of the spring water just in case something like this happened..... is not what happened.

Recently, I've been training with Ariane and Glenys in this body and I wanted to see the result of my efforts in a practical battle.

While in my skeletal body, my feelings of fear were heavily suppressed and I could act uninhibited, but the cost of using the spring water was the return of said emotions, the fear causing the non-battle hardened me to stiffen up while fighting.

However, I demonstrated the result of Glenys' training in the last fight.

I still couldn't endure the tension for very long, but the fact that I could take part in short battles while maintaining my composure was an important step in my training.

Remembering what I endured at Glenys' and Ariane's hand caused a shudder to run down my back, so I shook my head to clear those thoughts away.

As for my appearance, it was neither that of a regular elf nor of a dark elf like Ariane. Elves were a rarity in human society so anyone with elongated ears seemed to be classified as an elf.

I wasn't gonna point that out here since now wasn't the time to explain my circumstances, but I did correct one thing.

"No..... we are not from Rouen Forest. We belong to a village in Great Canada Forest."

Ariane slowly pulled back her gray hood and revealed her lilac skin and golden eyes to Zahar and the others.

"Kyun! Kyun!"

I think a few of Zahar's men held their breath as they gazed upon Ariane, the weird atmosphere made Ponta assert herself by my feet.

"Canada..... the major power of the elves, in such a place....."

Zahan knew something about Canada, but Lille was confused by the name, so she looked to him and asked straight up asked: "What's Canada?".

"As you can see, we are not human. Do you still wish to employ us? If so, what we seek is information as a reward. What is your answer?"

Zahar's and the other guards' eyes simultaneously fell upon Lille.

For a moment, Zahar seemed as if he was about to open his mouth to speak, but Lille stepped forward and answered before he could say anything.

"If it's within my capacity, I will answer any questions until you're satisfied! It is a cheap fee for guaranteeing my safety on this journey!"

While Lille puffed out her chest as she made her prideful declaration, I cast Chiome a glance.

When she caught my look, Chiome nodded once before stepping in front of Lille and removed the over hat from her head.

"There is only one thing I want to know....."

The normally quiet Chiome spoke in an intense voice, that I've yet to see her use, which caught Lille and her guards off guard.

The abrupt removal of her hat had also exposed her cat ears.

“.....Beastman.”

One of Chiome’s ears fidgeted when she heard that mutter comment.

However, because elves like Ariane and I were present none of them openly showed any disdain towards her, as the relation between the two races was unknown to them.

It seems that Canada held a considerable amount of influence on the Northern Continent.

“I am looking into my brother’s recent activity in Nozan Kingdom. If there were any recent incidents or conspicuous activity, I want you to tell me.”

She cast her gaze over everyone to gauge their reactions after stated her desires.

Lille immediately looked back to Zahar and gave him a questioning looked, but it seemed like he was struggling to remember if anything like that had occurred.

No luck..... as that thought was crossing my mind I let out a sigh, but some of the guards starting talking amongst themselves, one of them getting up to whisper something in Zahar’s ear.

Zahar’s face lite up when he was reminded of something, so he coughed loudly and slowly started to talk.

“..... Apparently, an intruder snuck into the palace’s treasury,..... rumor has it that the intruder had been a beastman. It caused a big commotion at the time since they managed to elude the palace guards, but nothing was found to have been taken. The intruder has yet to be captured.”

Judging by his expression, that was something hard for him to say, but Chiome wasn’t all that worried about it.

However, something he said caught my interest.

I didn’t know how much importance the country placed in its treasury, but some level of security should be stationed at such an important facility.

Infiltration and elusiveness weren't common abilities. Moreover, to not steal anything after breaking in and avoid capture was very unusual.

Unlike on the Southern Continent, beastmen like Chiome, who called themselves the People of the Plains and Mountains, had to spend their life hiding away from humans, so their lives in general weren't easy.

Escaping without stealing even a small amount of money didn't seem like the actions of a beastman or human.

I tried to examine Chiome's expression while thinking so.

Had she guessed that the thief Zahar was speaking of was Sasuke?

Ariane picked up Ponta, who'd begun rubbing up against her leg and calmly watched the exchange unfold.

Meanwhile, Zahar continued to speak on a difficult subject.

"I believe that throughout the three countries that border the theocracy, almost all beastmen have been hunted down by the holy knights. Whenever the theocracy is in need of labor, ours and the other countries would turn over any captured beastmen."

Chiome's blue eyes took on a sharp glint as she looked down at Zahar.

Zahar seemed to be experienced with dealing with coercion, and while he had an unpleasant expression on his face, he didn't waver.

"Hmm, does that country acting as the center of your religion allow their armed forces to freely enter your country?"

The guards behind Zahar began to emit a dangerous aura when they heard my impromptu question.

However, Zahar clenched his fist to maintain his composure while looking straight ahead.

"Of course, an act like this wouldn't be acceptable under normal circumstances. The church's doctrine allows for an ideal human society to exist. However,

since the theocracy's military forces are small, they lack the scope necessary to oppose other nations.....”

Zahar's statement shocked Lille, who had been silent up until now, making her gasp and clench her fists.

Apparently, no one had ever told her about this.

For someone as prideful as Lille and in her position, the fact that her country could not oppose the interference of another nation must have been an unbearable insult.

The Hiruku religion's shadow was ever expanding.

However, now was not the time or place to think it over too much.

When I brought my fingers to my lips and whistled, Shiden stopped grazing and ran towards me.

“We'll accept the payment for now. I don't know if more monsters will appear. We will accompany Lille-dono to the Dimo Earldom. We can continue this conversation on horseback.”

Lille turned her head in my direction and nodded in response to my statement.

“Of course! There is still much that needs to be done.”

As Lille muttered to herself, Zahar regained his composure behind her.

After standing up, he picked up the unconscious Nina and carried her over to his own horse.

Our first stop would be the Dimo Earldom..... I stroked the scruff of Shinden's neck as I thought it over and scanned the surrounding area.

So, which direction did we come from again?

Chapter 11: Those Who Smile

Soulia, the capital of Nozan Kingdom.

Two days ago the capital had been surrounded by an unidentified undead force.

The tens of thousands of undead would attack in irregular intervals, but the kingdom's comparatively small forces were able to fend them off using the city's massive walls and barely survive the grinding battle.

The clashing of the soldiers and other fighters against the spider monsters and undead would occasionally make its way to the royal palace in the center of the city.

The fact that the royal palace was separated from the main battlefield by an internal wall and its minimalistic appearance were an indicator for this region's long history of conflict.

However, such a simplistic looking palace also contained a lot of furnishings and decorations that showcased the country's prestige.

In fact, the guest rooms for foreign diplomats was by no means inferior to the accommodations provided by other countries.

In on such room, two people sat opposite to one another on some of the room's sofas.

One of them was a strict-looking, middle-aged man that wore clothes whose quality, despite not being all that extravagant, gave away their actual value.

In this case, the person wearing said clothes was this country's highest authority, King Asparuf Nozan Soulia.

However, his usual dignified Kingly manner was not present as he sat in front of a person leisurely drinking tea. Instead, he did his best it while he spoke in a more modest tone.

“Palermo-sama, so you attend to stay here of your own volition?”

The man sitting opposite to King Asparuf paused for a moment before slowly nodding his head.

The person in question wore an extravagant version of the canonical robes of a Hiruku priest and smiled as he set his tea cup aside.



His black hair had been slicked back and he appeared to be a bit nervous.

Excluding the pope, this man was one of the seven most powerful people of Nozan's neighboring country, the Hiruku Theocracy.

Cardinal Palermo Avaritia Liberalitas gave the king a friendly smile as he answered his question.

"I preach the word of god, to turn my back on the flock simply because tens of thousands of undead appeared..... If I were to leave, not only would my faith be called into question, I would also lose any kind of credibility in the eyes of the local congregation. If I were to do that, the populace of the royal capital would be thrown into disorder.."

Palermo let out a large sigh when he finished speaking and directed a serious look at the king.

"God watches the actions of men. The people need to be united to face the tribulations of God. I have no doubt that should this country overcome in these trying times, it shall receive a great blessing."

The king gave Palermo an ambiguous nod as the cardinal spoke a quiet prayer.

"..... Disaster has befallen this country, overcoming it should deepen the bonds between the capital's populace..... But, it can also be weathered away....."

The king's eyes narrowed as he directed his gaze out of a nearby window, trying to see beyond his sight.

"How many reinforcements can my children gather? How many days must we endure..... Are all of God's trials as difficult as this one....."

The king's eyes became clouded as he feebly lowered his head.

While the king looked away a deviant pleasure began to fill Palermo's eyes.

However, since he had lowered his head early, his expression was reflected in the table.

“God never ignores the yearning of the heart. Therefore, I believe that God’s guidance has led me here.”

The King’s cleared his eyes when he heard Palermo’s words.

“.....Th-That’s right.”

Cardinal Liberalitas cheerfully smiled as he listened to the King’s hopeful words.

“Even the people of the faith are humans, like the people of this country. The purpose of our order is to extend a hand to those who’ve faced great hardship in their lives. I have already sent a few subordinates to contact the Pope.”

The man sitting in front of him looked like the face of God for a split second.

However, rising doubts caused the king to speak out.

“Y-You were able to get a messenger through the blockade?”

Palermo’s brow slightly moved at the king’s question.

“My subordinates are highly skilled holy knights, I sent a few of them out in the middle of the night. They shall not fall to the faithless undead.”

The King cautiously nodded his head at the smiling Palermo.

“Oh, I see. A recent report I received did mention that those things lose their leadership at night. It’s a rather strange characteristic the soldiers discovered.”

Palermo’s fingertips twitched at the king’s comment but his smiling expression remained intact.

“Even so, I am merely cleric, therefore I do not fully understand the behavior of the undead. We must weather this storm to keep the flame of hope alight.”

A determined light ignited within the King’s eyes as he listened to Palermo’s words. However, an unexpected sensation caused Palermo to unintentionally turn away.

“? Is there something wrong Lord Palermo?”

Palermo lightly cleared his throat before replying to the King's question.

"No, don't worry. It's just your imagination."

Palermo said so, but unrest began to emerge in the depths of his eyes.

However, before the king could pursue the matter any further a knock on the door called the king away.

After seeing King Asparuf off, Palermo looked in a certain direction again, wrinkles forming between his eyebrows.

"Two of the Ghost Knights I sent out..... I guess the guards were more talented than I initially thought. Still, I've felt something like this before..... a bad omen perhaps."

After saying that he took a deep breath and sighed.

"There's no way. I don't know if I can send them right now, but four additional Ghost Knights should suffice. Still the cost of creating four of them....."

Palermo's eye traveled in the direction the King went as he spoke to himself.

His face twisted into a sadistic smile.

"Well, I need to work hard and enlighten the people. To watch in person as the hope rots away in their hearts, it's a pleasure I don't experience all that often."

Chapter 12: Fort Hill

The sky had gradually been dyed crimson as the sun set.

The hilly countryside started to mirror the sky, changing the appearance of the scenery. A group of elongated shadows could be seen heading south.

We accidentally encountered Princess Lille of the Nozan Kingdom.

Though she was eleven years old, she acted in a manner one would expect of a royal family's member.

We were currently in the middle of escorting her to the Dimo Earldom, the princess riding on her guard Zahar's horse.

Occasionally the childish princess would peak out her head from in-between Zahar's arms and look behind her.

Even from here I could see the understandable worry in her expression.

It wasn't me the princess had been staring at.

The unconscious Nina, one of the imperial guards apart of the group we were now working with, was also riding Shiden's massive dragon-like body.

Princess Lille's gaze was focused on her.

The Knight's leader, Zahar, initially planned to strap her to his horse, but even a sturdy war horse like his had its limits.

We learned that princess Lille's carriage had been destroyed, so she unabashedly looked at Shiden and asked to ride together with us.

However, Zahar put an end to that idea by explaining the ramifications of a princess being placed in the hands of a foreign power, let alone another race.

Right now, Nina was strapped to my back with some simple bands we'd

managed to put together.

Ariane sat behind me to support her figure from behind.

Despite the sheer size of a dragon mount, four people riding on it would have been a bit much, so Chiome borrowed a horse from one of the dead guards.

Chiome had never ridden a horse until now, but her motor nerves were rather impressive..... She almost immediately understood how to ride after grabbing the reins.

Her race's superior physical abilities allowed them to run from forest to forest without any difficulty. Horses could only increase their speed in the flatlands, so they'd been deemed unnecessary.

Had it not been for the persecution, her people wouldn't have been forced to live in the forest and mountains, but I suppose they were expanding into the plains beyond the Wind Dragon Mountain Range now.

After developing the land and cutting down the forest, the plains might grow even larger.

If that happened there wouldn't be anything lost in introducing horseback riding for long distance transportation. It might be better to implant a few horses in the area.

After getting the horse under control, Chiome would occasionally stroke the horse's neck and took the effort to keep track of its condition.

From the side, it was like watching an expert horseman.

Did the beastmen also have a racial trait of understanding the heart of animals?

With that thought in mind, I looked down at a yawning Ponta as she nestled within Shiden's mane.

Spirit beast were animals that humans could rarely tame..... yet the supposedly timid fluffy fox became chummy with Chiome almost immediately.

She'd been cautious of me at first, but she became friendly after I baited her with

food, so that wasn't a good comparison.

Or did Ponta realize since the beginning that I hadn't been a human, but some sort of elven subspecies.

"Kyun?"

Ponta looked back at me and tilted her head when she noticed my stare.

I shook my head at Ponta and then looked ahead again.

When we joined the princess' party, I noticed that Ponta didn't seem all that interested in princess Lille and didn't even try to approach Zahar or the other guards.

As for the unconscious knight Nina, every once in awhile she would tickle the tip of the knight's nose with her fluffy tail, but that was more of a mischievous prank than anything.

While it was rather cute, she was only able to act this boldly because the other person was unconscious.

As I thought about such things, an unexpected movement behind me heralded that someone had regained consciousness.

"H.....uh.....! Wh-What is this....."

Nina uttered a confused cry as she started twisting her body about.

Gradually, she began to recognize her surroundings, including the fact that she was tied to someone wearing full-body armor..... as the meaning of the situation set in she began to violently struggle.

"Where are we!? Who in the world are you!?"

We were at the tail end of the group and the only thing reflected in her eyes was my armor, on top of that her memory must have been vague due to what happened to her.

"Don't struggle, Nina-dono."

After speaking to her, I urged us towards Zahar and Lille's horse and called out to them.

"Zahar-dono, Lille-dono, please stop for a moment. Nina-dono is awake."

Lille leaned out of Zahar's arm cradle to take a look when I said that.

"Nina!? Nina's awake!? What a relief....."

".....Princess! This is....."

Princess Lille was ecstatic when she caught sight of Nina, while Nina herself immediately stopped struggling when she heard the princess's voice.

"Do you feel okay Nina? Is there any discomfort in your arms or body?"

Zahar and I simultaneously brought our mounts to a stop before I began to undo the restraints that tied Nina to me.

By that point, the memory of what had happened to her must have returned as Nina looked down at her arm.

"Was certain..... my arm was cut off..... I should have died."

She moved her formerly severed arm a few times as she muttered to herself.

"Arc-dono, the one wearing the armor, reattached your arm with healing magic!"

When she saw Nina's bewildered expression, Lille made a giant smile as she leaped from between Zahar's arms onto the ground.

After sliding down from Shiden, Nina went down on her knee in front of her master, who came to greet her.

"That's wonderful! I was so worried about you, Nina!"

"Princess, I am sorry to have troubled you....."

Nina hung her head as she tried to apologize, but the little princess embraced her instead.

It was obvious that Lille didn't need or want those words as she buried her face in Nina's chest with tears in her eyes.

They stayed like that for a while before Zahar got down from his horse and spoke up.

"Princess we still need to leave this territory immediately. Since Nina's wellbeing has been confirmed, we can quicken our pace."

Zahar scanned the area as he said that, and while Lille seemed dissatisfied with that she understood his argument and separated from Nina's chest.

"It shouldn't be that long until we reach Fort Hill?"

Zahar nodded at Lille's question before his gaze returned to Nina.

"That's good then, we will be able to properly reward Arc-dono then!"

After saying that she and Zahar's returned to their horse.

Nina watched her back as she walked away before turning around, where her eyes bulged when she caught sight of Ariane's face.

"An elf!?"

Her shock only intensified as Chiome brought her horse alongside shiden.

"A beastman!?"

Her shouts caught Lille's attention when Zahar was in the middle of lifting her up.

"Nina! Those people are our benefactors and have agreed to protect us as we travel! Please refrain from such rude behavior!!"

"Forgive me, princess!"

Nina almost reflexively bowed in our direction upon being scolded by Lille.

"Arc-dono, I am indebted to you. Not only did you subjugate those terrifying monsters, you even saved my life."

Although Nina appeared to be much younger than Zahar, her acts of gratitude beat the male knight's hands down.

Though she was a woman, her skin was slightly tanned and there was a fearless gleam in her eyes. However, there was also a bit of hostility reflected in those same eyes when she looked at Chiome and Ariane.

The two of them probably noticed this as well.

The teachings of the Hiruku religion were ingrained in her home, while there wasn't outright disdain or contempt, she was probably an accurate representation of how humans would react.

Still that may be unavoidable.

The sense of values that have been cultivated by years of religious indoctrination couldn't simply be swept away.

Princess Lille's disregard of such values was the exception rather than the rule.

"There's no need to thank me. I simply did not want to watch a young girl weep over a lost loved one."

Nina lowered her head once more before turning around.

"Where is my horse?"

"It's right here!"

One of the guards stepped forward along with Nina's horse.

The guards managed to capture the unruly horse after Nina lost consciousness.

After she received the reins, Nina mounted the horse in a manner you wouldn't expect from a recently injured person.

Once she received her sword from another guard she brought her horse next to Zahar's.

"I apologise for making you worry."

“The trip may be harsh on your body, but I’m counting on you.”

Zahar instructed the others with a hand gesture after replying to Nina’s statement.

At that signal, our party resumed our trek towards the Dimo Earldom.

The scenery finally began to change just as the deep crimson sky transitioned to a dark indigo shade.

As the daylight vanished, the possibility of getting lost increased, but a large wall soon appeared in front of us.

The wall was about ten meters tall. It was hard to make out anything due to the shadows, but the wall seemed to be made from stone and it stretched endlessly to our left and right.

I was reminded of the wall built around the human settlement of Tajiento back on the southern continent.

“What is this wall?”

While slowing Shinden with a pull of the reins, I asked a nearby guard about it, he seemed a bit relieved as he answered.

“This is the defensive wall of Dimo Earldom’s Fort Hill. We’ll be in the Earldom once we cross it.”

As he spoke the tension that the party carried seemed to ease as they looked upon the wall.

“We finally made it.”

“Princess, the gate is just east of here.”

Lille was also relieved by those words, behind her Zahar nodded his head before reaching into a bag tied to his horse and pulling out a folded cloth.

Lille seemed puzzled by this and looked up to ask him about it.

“What is that?”

Zahar's eyes bulged at her question. The cloth looked to be made of high-quality fabric and there was a complex chest embroidered in its center.

That was probably the crest of Nozan Kingdom.

Zahar carefully opened the kingdom's flag and tied it his own sword sheath.

He then handed it to one of his subordinates, who immediately set off with the flag raised above his head.

They probably hadn't displayed any article indicating their affiliation until now because we'd been crossing a hostile country.

They were entering friendly territory so they decided to show their allegiance.

Now that the sun had set, I didn't know if they would be able to identify the crest on the flag, but a group of people suddenly approaching the wall was bound to have someone sent out to investigate.

The chances that the other side would attack before they verified the crest was at least lessened.

When Ariane looked over my shoulder to see what was happening she seemed to understand and directed her golden eyes towards the shadows above the wall.

Trying to gauge her response, I asked her a question.

"Ariane-dono, do the different elven villages also have something to display their affiliation?"

"There is, but they're only used by warriors operating outside their home village."

Ariane nodded before answering my question.

Apparently, only elven warriors carried items like that.

"I see a moving silhouette."

Before I could inquire what those would be, Ariane pointed out something she'd caught sight of.

Above us, torches spread out in equal intervals ignited one after another, revealing a small fort behind the wall that had been hidden in the darkness.

There were in fact guards stationed on the wall, the sound of the hoof beats along the wall and our chatting must have caught their attention and they came to check things out.

Eventually, we reached a section of the wall that was illuminated by several large bonfires, and were greeted by a line of soldiers along the wall.

Below the guards' feet was an impressively large gate.

I guess we reached the main entrance.

“Who are you!? Are you aware that this is the Dimo Earldom of Nozan Kingdom!?”

An aged gentleman stepped forward on the wall and challenged us.

Zahar pulled his horse up to the gate before leaving Lille on his horse and dismounting.

“My name is Zahar Bahárov! I'm the personal bodyguard of Nozan's Princess, Princess Lille Nozan Soulia. You are standing in front of Princess Lille.”

Zahar's voice was loud and clear as he introduced himself to the commander and brought his horse closer to a bonfire.

The subordinate that raised the flag also followed behind them.

“I am Lille Nozan Soulia! Messenger of King Asparuf Nozan Soulia to Earl Dimo! I request that you open this gate!”

When he saw Lille majestic appearance sitting on Zahar's horse, he panicked and started shouting orders to the soldiers behind him.

“Open the gate! Open the gate immediately! We are receiving Princess Lille! Open the gate!!”

They were staring across the wall at the territory of Salma Kingdom, which was

an enemy territory.

For them, the idea that their own country's princess was travelling across hostile territory lead by only a small handful of guards must've been utterly unexpected.

With a creaking sound, the massive gate opened up in time for the out of breath commander from to run out and kneel before Lille as Zahar lead the horse through the gate

"Please excuse my rudeness, Princess Lille. In all due respect, I never imagined that you would be able to cross Salma Kingdom.....!"

Princess Lille immediately replied to the prostrating commander.

"It is alright, it's your duty to protect these lands from Salma Kingdom. Despite the hardships we faced in the Buranie territory, the lord needs to be informed of the situation in the capital."

The commander was utterly dumbfounded by Lille's statement but he lowered his head once more when the gate fully opened.

"You and your party are welcome to stay the night. I request your leniency, since there are a few unrefined people that have gathered in this place."

Zahar nodded at the commander's words before giving the signal to follow him.

The guards followed Lille's lead and I began to direct Shiden beyond the gate.

However, the moment Shiden's massive figure entered the bonfires' light an uproar was created.

The old commander's eyes bulged before turning to Zahar for guidance. Zahar didn't say anything though, only nodding his head and heading towards the fort, so the commander would occasionally look back at us as he followed behind him.

We then entered the fort. Everyone's eyes were focused on the suspicious knight riding Shiden, and it would have been really inconvenient if this helmet came off right now.

I grabbed my canteen from my waist and started sipping the hot spring water through a straw.

Now in a situation where my helmet was removed, it would be easier to suppress the ruckus around the sudden appearance of an elf.

“Kyun”

Ponta let out large yawn on top of Shinden head and shut her eyes.

Night had completely overtaken the area now, and the only sources of light were the pale moonbeams that broke through the clouds above and the bonfires around the fort.

Ariane and Chiome avoided the staring of the soldiers because they hid their racial traits with their cloak and hat respectively, so they were looking over the fort.

In a nutshell, the interior of the fort was rather bare and the Earl Dimo didn't seem to be here.

However, the day has already passed and the lack of streetlights made the prospect of traveling on an undesirable one.

Since it seemed that we would be staying the night, I cast a sideways glance towards Ariane. Quite a bit of fatigue must have accumulated over the extensive riding trip and I was worried about the condition of her butt.

While I was considering such things I overheard an argument between Lille and Zahar.

“But why Zahar!? From Fort Hill, the capital of the Earldom shouldn't be more than half a day away!!”

Zahar simply shook his head and the distraught Lille grievances.

“That's exactly why Princess. It's been two days since we left the capital, we need to rest now that we've passed enemy territory.”

“But, while we do that the capital might.....!”

Her other guard, Nina, stepped forward and made her appeal to Lille.

The princess was obviously frantic over the matter, so she slowly explained thing to her while maintaining eye contact.

“You mustn’t overexert yourself, Princess..... If you were to collapse, who could petition for aid in this crisis? Even if we left right now, time would be needed to gather the necessary forces.”

Lille’s small shoulders trembled and she looked down after she heard that.

The old commander, who had been silent till now, began to speak in a respectful manner.

“I suppose that there has been an unprecedented crisis in the capital. If you are intending to seek an audience with the Earl, you can write him a letter explaining the circumstances and I can dispatch a messenger to him. Princess, you are welcome to replenish your energy here until then.”

After saying his piece the man lowered his head to Lille once more.

Lille looked down upon him from her horse, then looked between her two escorts before lowering her head and giving a brief reply.

“I understand..... I ask that you contact the earl in Keen”

The three of them let out a simultaneous sigh of relief.

After that exchange, the commander was informed of the capital’s current state, and a messenger was dispatched to Keen on their fastest horse to inform the Earl of Lille’s arrival and the reason behind her visit.

Chapter 13: Moments in the Fort

Since we were part of the princess' guards, two rooms in Fort Hill were provided to Ariane, Chiome and I.

Because the rooms were usually reserved for soldiers or officers they were rather narrow and sparsely furnished.

When I sat down on one of the bunk beds in the room, it strained under the weight of my armor and collapsed in on itself.

Since we'd been acknowledged as mercenaries that had been hired as the princess's escorts, Ariane and I had been invited to the dinner table, but I declined. I was more interested in mingling with the soldiers stationed here.

Despite this being a fortress situated along the front lines, I was interested in seeing what they would serve to a princess, but I wanted to avoid causing another commotion in human territory.

That's why I was eating tonight's dinner in my room, with the full course lined up on the table in front of me.

The scent of freshly baked buckwheat bread wafted into my nose. The soup consisted of boiled vegetables and beans, and there was a piece of thigh meat.

I imagined that something rather simple would be prepared as dinner in a fortress, but apparently my expectations had been proven wrong.

According to the person who brought me my meal, those who had been doing business with the soldiers had gathered along the outskirts of the fort and built a small town and field nearby.

Thanks to that, the fort was supplied with freshly harvested vegetables and bread from the nearby fields.

"While the dish itself is rather ordinary, the ingredients are as abundant as the server suggested."

Ariane removed her cloak and exposed her pointed ears as she sat in front of me, muttering her impression of the meal in-between spoonfuls of soup.

Chiome, who was tearing into her dinner, agreed with Ariane's mutterings.

"That seems to be the case. My clan doesn't have a grasp of the geography around here."

Chiome said that after lowering her piece of thigh meat.

The Dimo Earldom seemed to control the peninsula that stretched into the Southern sea which had been originally a part of the Nozan Kingdom. However, after Lord Burnett of the Salma Kingdom conquered the connecting territory, the grand wall was built to protect them from invasion.

Another benefit from that decision was the decrease in monsters within the peninsula, allowing more land to be cultivated and explored.

However, the large wall wasn't able to form a complete blockade.

When I asked the server about it, he managed to peel his eyes away from Ariane and answered me.

The western section of the Ruan Forest spread into the peninsula's roots and it was impossible to build their wall due to interference from the elves.

Whenever Salma forces tried to enter the earldom through the forest they'd inevitably confront the elves. Lord Burnett didn't want to give the Earl and the elves a reason to unite against him, so he stopped meddling with the forest.

Due to that, towns on the peninsula still needed to be surrounded by a wall as monsters were still able to invade from Ruan Forest.

If that was the case, I imagined it would be simpler to just build the wall around the forest, but things were more complicated than that.

Many people lived within reach of the shallow parts of the forest, not to mention that it stretched into the northern and southern directions. They would need a wall twice the length of the current one in order to build around the forest.

The construction of such a wall would bankrupt the Earl.

After informing us of the topography and the circumstances of the surrounding region, the server decided to leave. After locking the door behind him I was finally able to eat.

“Kyun!”

Ponta had already finished off her portion of soup and was asking for a second helping.

“Well, we certainly came across a bizarre undead situation rather quickly.....”

I spoke my thought as I removed my helmet. Because the effect of the hot spring water had yet to wear off, I was attacked by a strange sense of hunger when I looked down at my food.

Ponta was still nudging her plate forward for more, so I stripped off some thigh meat and gave it to her.

Feeling their gaze on me I looked towards Chiome.

“Chiome-dono I have to ask, that break-in Zahar-dono brought up, is that...”

“That was undoubtedly Sasuke-oniisan.”

Chiome’s brief reply was exactly what I thought it’d be.

“I was listening as well, but didn’t the witnesses only state that the culprit was a beast man?”

Ariane was, naturally, rather doubtful of Chiome’s unwavering certainty and I had to agree with her on that point.

“The high physical ability and dexterity required to break into a heavily guarded vault undetected also had me thinking that the culprit was a member of your clan, but the lack of conclusive evidence and other factors make me question the assumption that Sasuke-dono had been the perpetrator.”

Chiome took another bite from her meat before shaking her head.

“The culprit stole nothing despite successfully breaking into the treasury. That was what Zahar-dono heard, but what Sasuke-oniisan had been searching for was a Spirit Contract Crystal my clan lost.”

I recall Chiome bringing that name up before, it had been during our initial stay in her clan’s former village that she showed me a pulsating rhombic jewel.

It was a magical tool that Hanzo the First had created, a tool that allowed its possessor to make a contract with spirits. Even beastmen, who possessed a low aptitude for magic, could wield powerful spirit magic if they had one of them.

Though they seemed to utilize spirit magic in the form of “ninjutsu”, Chiome and the other great ninja all had a Spirit Contract Crystal embedded in their bodies.

“Chiome-dono, you’re talking about the thing we discussed in the village, right? If I’m not mistaken, Hanzo the First created ten of crystals, and your clan should have nine of them.”

Chiome gave me a small nod as I dug up everything I had been told about the crystals.

“I think Sasuke-oniisan obtained some information pointing him towards Nozan’s treasury, so he snuck in. However, if we believe Zahar’s story, he didn’t find anything there.”

I soaked a bit of bread in the soup and popped it in my mouth while listening to Chiome’s deductions.

The slightly hard bread softened and was easier to eat.

“I see, but it was quite some time ago that Sasuke-dono broke into the treasury. There isn’t much of an interval between that and Sasuke-dono’s arrival on the Southern Continent.....”

Ariane’s ears pricked up when she heard that, though she’d been quietly sitting at the table she’d been paying attention.

“In other words..... he found a clue inside Nozan’s treasury that sent him off in that direction?”

“Yes, it’s merely speculation, but.....”

Chiome’s stopped eating as I answered to Ariane’s question.

That conversation had ended as far as they were concerned, and I moved on to where we were going from here.

“If we want to see whatever clue he found, we’ll have to get into the Nozan treasury, won’t we?”

Two pairs of eyes turned towards me.

“.....Should we break in like Sasuke?”

Ariane tilted her head and asked that question. While breaking and entering was relatively simple with Dimensional Step, if we were caught and the skill discovered, things would become troublesome later down the line.

There was a more reliable method anyway.

“No, the princess is supposed to be returning to the capital with reinforcements. When that happens, why not take advantage of that and ask to accompany them? A tour of the treasury as a reward is a relatively simple request.”

Ariane folded her arms under her large chest and her brow began to wrinkle as she thought over my suggestion.

“That certainly is a more guaranteed method..... Does it seem like the city Lille is trying to reach is in a similar situation as Tajiento?”

Chiome showed a slight reaction when she heard that name as if she was briefly reminded of Tajiento.

Honestly, we haven’t been informed of the entire situation concerning Soulia. Seeing as we were basically bodyguards abruptly hired to escort our employer to Dimo’s capital, Keen, I assume they didn’t want other races to learn the full extent of the situation.

Still, it could be guessed to a certain degree based on pieces of their conversations.

The Nozan Kingdom's capital is currently besieged by an undead horde and those spider chimeras.

However, we still needed to investigate the treasury located within the city.

When Tajiento became a battlefield, fires broke out all over the place, so it was up in the air whether or not the treasury would remain safe.

“After the meeting with the Lord, we must negotiate with princess Lille to have us join their reinforcements. If the capital falls or the treasury is burnt to the ground, we could lose the only clue we have on Sasuke-dono's fate.”

“That's right.”

Ariane nodded as she agreed with my opinion.

However, next to her, Chiome was making a difficult face.

“About that. We don't know if Earl Dimo will actually accept the princess' request and dispatch reinforcements to the capital tomorrow.”

Ariane snapped her head towards Chiome when she heard that.

“The capital is the center of the kingdom, right? If an allied city is facing a crisis, wouldn't you try to save it?”

Chiome and I shared a look at Ariane's causal statements.

For the most part, there was a strong bond between elves, and it must have seemed strange to her to not help your fellow countrymen.

Looks like she forgot.....

“If I understand the situation correctly, the Dimo Earldom and Lille's royal family have a relationship similar to the one between the elves of Canada and Ruan Forest. Ariane-dono, weren't you dissatisfied when you heard Canada was dispatching a rescue party?”

A complicated expression appeared on her face and she held her tongue when I said that.

“..... I see.”

“Let’s reach Keen tomorrow and plan our course of action from there. We’ll be heading towards the Nozan Kingdom no matter what happens.”

If we weren’t able to accompany Lille, it only meant that we’d be a little frustrated trying to pin down the Kingdoms location.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

I looked down at my feet when I heard Ponta’s cheerful cries, only to find her pushing her plate forward again.

“You never change do you.....”

I stroked the top of Ponta’s head as I said that.

Chapter 14: Arc's Master Plan | Part 1

Early the next morning, before the sun even breached the horizon.

Shades of the previous night still lingered as Zahar lead our medium sized group southwards down the highway towards Keen.

A single, plain carriage sat in the center of the circle of mounted royal guards.

The subject of this escort detail, princess Lille, was aboard that carriage.

It was the only carriage the soldiers at Fort Hill owned and it had been prepared to replace Lille's destroyed carriage.

At the tail end of the mounted guards, Ariane, Chiome and I all rode on Shiden's back.

We took several breaks along the way, only traveling in a southwards direction the entire trip, and around noon we and the princess's party closed in on Keen.

The robust and solid city walls gave the same impression of being hard to penetrate as the wall near Fort Hill.

The streets beyond the wall were quite busy and appeared rather affluent, there were even fully loaded caravans waiting to enter the city.

This must have been the first time some of the guards have been here as they were openly surprised by the status of the isolated earldom.

According to the guards, Ruan Forest made it impossible to completely seal off the peninsula, but the number of monsters beyond Fort Hill had still decreased, resulting in the Earldom's newfound wealth

Normally, small-scaled villages were scattered through a territory as a countermeasure against monsters, but the farmlands of the earldom were expanded with that threat no longer present.

A lot of goods were delivered to Keen on regular a basis, the surplus of which would be shipped to Nozan Kingdom via the Clyde Golf.

A line of caravans, which were transporting goods to the county's capital, threw sidelong glances at the royal emissaries led by Zahar who were traveling along the highway with constant speed.

The number of eyes on the simple carriage increased the closer we got to the city, but even more eyes were focused on the dragon riding behind it.

The highway also became more crowded the closer we got to the city, unavoidably lowering our speed. Lille was frustrated by this when she stuck her head out the carriage's window.

Before long we arrived at Keen's main gate, thanks to the message from yesterday, the city guards had cleared a path for us, Zahar even saluted them as he passed through the gate on horseback.

Once we entered the city another group of guards joined us and skillfully lead us through the streets.

The fact that the path leading to the Lord's mansion had been cleared of all other traffic attracted a crowd of curious bystanders.

".....We're attracting a lot of attention."

Behind me, Ariane muttered that statement from under her gray cloak's hood as she took a look around.

"Well, there's nothing we could do about it."

We arrived at the feudal lord's mansion just as I uttered that reply.

While the sturdy stone walls surrounding the mansion weren't as tall as the ones around the city, they still stood at five meters tall.

We followed the city guards through the large gate built into the wall.

Beyond the gate sat a large three-story mansion in the shape of a symbol, a large front garden separating it from the wall.

At the entrance of the mansion stood an aged nobleman and a dozen servants, waiting for the carriage to arrive.

Their task was probably to welcome Lille, considering that she crossed hostile territory to arrive here.

The aristocrat at the center of the servants was probably the lord of the manor.

Lille's carriage stopped once it arrived in front of the mansion.

The welcoming party was equally surprised when they caught sight of Shiden, but as expected from a nobleman, he quickly managed to overcome the commotion and everyone bowed to greet us.

When the coachman respectfully opened the carriage door, Lille quietly stepped to the ground.

Beside her, her escorts Zahar and Nina dismounted and firmly positioned themselves on both sides of the princess.

Lille examined the surroundings before stepping forward and began speaking with the bowing, aged nobleman.

"It is a difficult time to meet you. Are you, perhaps, the ruler of this land, Earl Dimo?"

The old nobleman immediately responded by deepening his bow and replied:

"You are correct, Princess Lille. I am the one this territory was entrusted to, Moore Du Dimo."

The Earl looked up as he politely answered the princess's question, his graying hair and round face reminding me of a portrait of Bach I saw in a music class once.

"Well, Earl. It may be improper on my part, but I believe the messenger has informed you of the situation. Earl, I implore you to raise the forces ne—"

Earl Dimo cut off Lille's words with a rushed statement.

“P-Princess Lille! I’m sorry to interrupt you, but the messenger only requested me to provide your highness asylum until the matters at the capital were settled.”

Lille’s eyes bulged at the Earl’s statement before she glared at the two escorts beside her.

“What’s the meaning of this Zahar, Nina!? Father sent us here in order to acquire reinforcements for the capital, didn’t he!? Why did your message only speak of protecting me!?”

At Lille’s direct castigation, Zahar kneeled before her and resolutely answered her questions.

“It was by the King’s will. The acquisition of reinforcements has been left to Teruva-sama and Sevaru-sama. Princess you are meant to stay here for a while.”

“What!? Father never mentioned anything like that we I spoke with him!”

Tears began to form in the corner of the princess’s eyes.

Nina showed her a gentle look upon seeing this.

“You are a kind-hearted person, Princess. The King knew that you would not simply leave had he simply ordered you to escape.”

There was a gentle undertone to Nina’s voice, but Lille simply shook her head in disapproval.

“I know that father cherishes me! However, I can’t accept that he would have me sit here and wait for things to settle themselves while our people suffer!”

She wiped the tears from her eyes and took a resolute stance when she spoke.

“Earl! How many soldiers can you spare to send towards the capital!?”

Earl Dimo’s round face stiffened when he heard the Princess’s strong words as he struggled with what to say.

“Princess Lille, knowing that the capital is under attack I would like nothing less

to send reinforcements, but it isn't realistic to dispatch soldiers there.'

The Earl wiped the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief as he voiced his circumstances.

"There are always five hundred soldiers stationed in Keen. Fort Hill, the fortress you passed through, has fifteen hundred. That totals to two thousand troops, which is all we have, I can't spare any to send to the capital. Currently, the Salma Kingdom separates us from the capital and if Fort Hill is vacated they might raid and seize it."

The Earl paused for a moment and lowered his eyebrows before voicing the other problems.

"It will also be difficult to organize and transport the soldiers through Salma Kingdom's territory. Unless they're in small numbers the opposition will be aware of the force's scale to some extent. Even if we took trade ships across the Clyde Golf it would take at least five or six days to reach the mainland. More time would also be required in order to properly prepare the soldiers."

Shades of disappointment appeared in the princess's eyes after hearing the Earl's explanation, lowering her head in defeat.

"So..... So, all I can do is sit here and wait for my kingdom to fall.....?"

Lille's gray eyes were wet with tears and droplets soon started to stain the ground like rain drops.

Her tiny shoulders trembled as Lille tried to say something, but only sobs escaped her mouth. The Imperial guards lowered their heads as they endured Lille's grief filled cries.

However, it was the princess who raised her head in such a gloomy atmosphere.

A sliver of determination returned to her eyes as she wiped her tears away.

"I won't abandon my people! The capital is surrounded by two layers of walls, father wouldn't lose that easily! Even if it takes days. I can still reach the capital with reinforcements in time!"

Lille's two escorts immediately spoke up at her declaration.

"Please wait, Princess! Even if we could send reinforcements to the capital, it's an absurd notion that you would personally lead them! How could we face the King if something were to happen to you!"

"Princess, please reconsider..... Zahar is more than capable of leading the reinforcements."

Lille rapidly shook her and protested against her two guards.

"I'm sick of it! Simply being protected all of the time!"

Tears continued to fall from her eyes as her shoulders shook and she clenched her small fists.

The princess' attempts to hold back her tears drew pity from Earl Dimo and the others, but she continued to endure it.

For adults, her display was nothing more than childish self-indulgence.

No matter how you choose to phrase it, she had to face the reality of the situation.

Only Nina and Zahar, the two escorts that were constantly with her, understood Lille's feelings towards her country and how distressed she was becoming.

"..... Given the number of undead attacking the city, who is to say whether or not this place will remain safe."

While Lille's mutter was so soft that only the two knights beside her should have heard it, but Ariane and Chiome had an elf's and beastman's sense of hearing, and mine was better than that of an ordinary human.

"Kyun....."

Possible sensing the heavy atmosphere, Ponta buried herself within Shiden's white mane.

I folded my arms as I processed the unexpected turn of events.

When I glanced back of Chiome and Ariane, both of seemed to be in agreement on how to proceed.

“.....Umm...”

Her hearing must have been more sensitive than I thought, as Lille looked back at me when she heard me.

“.....”

“Hm?”

I was caught off guard by suddenly locking eyes with Lille as her little body took large strides towards us.

Everyone’s eyes were on us as Lille stood in front of me.

“Arc-dono, you are a truly righteous man for escorting me here!”

I was a little suspicious about the sudden change in topics but out of curiosity I knelt before her and silently waited for her to continue.

“I cannot thank you enough for what you have already done, but will you lend me your assistance once more?”

The surround people began to stir when they heard her question.

“What is it that you seek?”

I already guessed what she was going to ask of me but urged her on nonetheless.

“I will return to my country and request aid from the other lords! I’ve heard that elves are sublime warriors and I ask for you to act as my guard for this journey once more!”

The guards and Earl Dino were all astonished by the princess’ proposal.

The Earl was the one that raised a shocked voice.

“Princess Lille, what did you just say!? T-These people are elves!?”

“Are you surprised?”

In response to his shouts, Ariane unintentionally broke her silence and spoke back in a low tone.

While I understood Ariane’s feelings, the Earl’s were unknown to me.

Given his extended contact with the elves of Ruan Forest, I imagine his impression of them wasn’t all that great.

“We have a non-interference agreement with Ruan, so what are elves doing here!?”

As the Earl continued to shout, Ariane gloomy took off her gray hood and revealed her face.

“!? She’s different from the elves that I know of.....”

Her slightly pointed ears, lilac skin, golden eyes and snow white hair puzzled the earl as she was completely different from the elves that lived near his territory.

“Naturally! I’m not an elf of Rouen Forest. I am a dark elf of Canada.”

The Earl didn’t reply to her, instead he turning to look questioningly at the princess’s personal guards.

“While we were traveling here, they helped us repel an enemy that had attacked us.”

Zahar noticed the Earl’s glance and gave a simple reply.

“For that alone you would allow elves to pry upon your country’s secrets!?”

Lille interrupted the Earl before the conversation could go further off topic than it already had.

“Such trivial things don’t matter now! I’m asking Arc-dono to accompany me back to our country!”

Her two escorts panicked when they remembered the main subject of the situation.

“Princess! Please reconsider!”

Zahar spoke in a strong tone as he approached Lille’s side and tried to grab her.

Lille quickly dodged his hand and stepped behind me, using me as a shield.

Well, that action translated to Lille choosing me to take her back the Nozan Kingdom, but how to proceed from here?

Our goal was to simply investigate the Kingdom’s treasury, while her request appeared in a timely manner, there were worrisome aspects about the situation.

Lille wanted to immediately petition other nobles for help after arriving in Nozan, but would the capital hold out till then?

There was also a more immediate problem.

The Earl and Lille’s two personal guards were opposed to the idea of letting her return to the Kingdom, and agreeing to do so would lead to a confrontation.

Although I could painstaking try to persuade them to agree to the outing, the capital could still fall in the meantime.

Somehow, I had to settle the matter here and now and head to Nozan Kingdom’s capital immediately..... while still being in a position to receive a reward afterwards.

It was a fairly difficult position to be in, but I had no choice but to negotiate.

While struggling to come up with a solution, I glanced back at Lille before my eyes drifted towards Chiome.

There was a strange tension in Chiome’s normally calm and unchanging blue eyes.

That was to be expected considering that our actions here would have a drastic influence over our future.

When I turned back around Zahar’s sharp gaze was waiting for me.

“Arc-done, please relinquish Princess Lille. You shall be rewarded for your

efforts up till now.”

He extended his thick arm and held out his hand towards me.

Despite having no skin on this skeletal body I could still feel Lille small hands grasping the arm of the Holy Armor of Belenus.

“Zahar-dono. I think I will accept Lille-dono’s request.”

Zahar was utterly dumbfounded by my words while Lille let out a small cheer behind me.

Chapter 15: Arc's Master Plan | Part 2

However, the argument didn't end there because Nina's gentle face turned to one of anger.

"Fool! The capital is besieged by a hundred thousand undead!! I will not allow Princess Lille to return to such a place!!"

Her voice trembled with barely restrained anger, but the content of what she said reached those around us.

Ariane, Chiome, and I groaned as the number of enemies increased with her shout.

"Hmm, so the undead attacking the capital exist in such a number....."

I knew that an army of undead had besieged the city, but the sheer size of the enemy forces was beyond expectation.

Having not heard any concrete numbers so far, Earl Dimo and his servants became suspicious when they heard that.

"I-Is that true? Are there really a hundred thousand undead.....?"

Earl Dimo surveyed the two escort knights and the guards they led, looking for truth.

Zahar and Nina cast their eyes down to avoid his gaze.

It seems that Nina's statement wasn't a mere exaggeration.

"Ma-Maybe it is impossible after all.....?"

Hiding behind me, Princess Lille looked at the stifled reactions for those around us and trembled.

(Just how long will their defenses hold out if they really were attacked by a

hundred thousand undead?)

Lille seemed to be more sensitive than most, as she managed to pick up on Ariane's whisper, and processed to loudly rebuke that sentiment.

"Father would not lose so easily! My elder brothers will surely have returned with reinforcements, and are helping defend the capital!!"

I found another worrisome point in Lille's statement.

"Lille-dono, you say you have two older brothers? Both of whom were sent to gather reinforcements as well?"

She nodded her head and answered my question.

"That is so! When we join my brother's forces, the monsters shall perish"

She raised her fist to emphasize her point.

Assuming that the two brothers managed to raise a large enough force to deal with an army of undead it would take quite a bit of time to organize it.

In this situation, it would be best to head to the capital, reduce the number of undead, and delay the city's collapse.....

If it was the capital of a major kingdom, it should be capable of accommodating a large number of people.

It would be nigh impossible to immediately topple the city, even with an army of a hundred thousand undead.

Breaking through the siege and joining the defensive forces should drag out the battle sufficiently enough to create a fighting chance.

I turned to my companions with that thought in mind.

Ariane was a dark elf who excelled in spirit magic and swordsmanship.

Chiome was one of the six great ninjas of the Blade Heart Clan and employed spirit magic as ninjutsu.

Shiden the dragon mount, built like a heavily armored truck and physically strong enough to run thousands of miles without stopping.

And the gluttonous Ponta.

Just how long could we delay the battle with just us..... honestly, I didn't know, but I did know we wouldn't fall immediately.

When I looked them in the eye, Ariane resigned herself, Chiome nodded her head, and I had no idea what Shiden was thinking.

Ponta seemed to be thinking about her next meal as usual.

“Then it's decided, we'll head directly to Nozan's capital.”

Everyone, including Lille, looked at me in disbelief when I said that.

“Wait Wait! We need to gather reinforcements before we arrive at the capital!”

Lille had been hiding behind me to avoid Zahar's reach until now, but she jumped out and restated her plan once more.

However, I shook my head and stopped her.

“Lille-dono, I do not know how well guarded the capital is. However, I understand that its defenses run the risk of being overrun should you try to gather troops from the surrounding territories. It's uncertain if your older brothers managed to obtain enough reinforcements, but if they have, it will take them time to organize them properly. In that case, we need to amass a minimal number of troops and immediately return to the capital to buy them enough time..... don't you think so?”

Lille blinked several times as she wrapped her head around what I said and she gave me a small nod.

“.....That's true! Even if you gather reinforcements, what good would it do if the capital fa—!”

It was Zahar, one of her personal guards, who cut off Lille before she could finish that thought.

“Please wait, Princess! A small mobile unit engaging in guerrilla warfare against one hundred thousand enemies is pure insanity! What happens if you manage to break through the siege only for reinforcements never to..... no, arrive too late?!”

Lille was somewhat frightened by Zahar’s shouting, to the point of audibly gulping.

When Lille looked up at me, I looked directly at her from the depths of my helmet.

“It is up to you, Lille-dono. However, you should be well aware that the three of us are confident in our skills, and the equivalent of a hundred soldiers each.”

Hearing my words, Lille regained her composure and nodded at me as she remembered the battle with the spider chimera.

On the other hand, Lille’s other guards began to emit a dangerous aura towards us, Ariane just seemed annoyed by this while Chiome maintained her composure.

They were probably insulted by that.

But this could be a good opportunity.

The fact that we were acting as representatives of the elves allow us to gauge the human’s strength as well as discouraging them from attacking in the future.

Also, since the enemy was undead, I could probably exterminate ten thousand of them using ‘that’.

Even if it was a test run, it wasn’t the kind of skill you could carelessly activate.

However, this kind of situation was the best place to test it.

“Lille-dono.”

“Lille-sama!”

Zahar and I simultaneously urged Lille to answer, her eyes darted back and forth

for a moment before she stuck out her chest and proudly declared her chose.

“I shall return to the capital! Zahar, Nina! This is my decision! Should Nozan’s capital fall, there will be nothing to deter the neighboring countries from invading our country!”

“.....Haa!” “Um!”

Zahar and Nina bit their lips and kneeled when they heard her determined declaration.

They openly showed their contempt as they glared at me though.

I was an outsider leading the princess to her death..... No, the Hiruku doctrine of treating elves and beastmen as abominations was also deeply ingrained in this region.

I doubt my actions could reduce the gap between the races, but that couldn’t be helped.

Besides, since I wanted to avoid using transfer magic in front of humans, I would only use it to flee with Lille in case of an emergency.

She would be needed later on and I would be hindered in various ways if her safety wasn’t guaranteed.

Especially since I’ve felt the stare of a pair of golden eyes piercing the back of my head for a while now.

“Kyun?”

Ponta seemed puzzled by the strange tension between Ariane and myself.

Lille looked at the guards stationed behind her two escorts and then set her sights upon Earl Dimo.

“Earl Dimo!”

“.....Ye-Yes!”

“Prepare a cavalry unit as fast as you can! As the Earl of this territory, allowing

me to return to the Kingdom without proper protection would be rather shameful on your part, wouldn't it!?"

Lille spoke in a dignified manner, her guards agreed with that statement as they directed silent pressure towards the earl.

Even if small, she was still royalty.

If he, as an aristocrat of the kingdom, were to send Lille off without providing enough soldiers to ensure her safety, he could be accused of having rebellious intention later on.

If the country were to fall, there would be no issue, but in the unlikely event that Nozan survived this disaster, he would unquestionably be removed from his position.

Given the situation, she made a concession by only requesting cavalry soldiers as her guards.

There couldn't be that many people who could be prepared on such short notice.

While losing cavalry would be a major loss by itself, if the improbable did happen it would be a small price to pay to ensure one's position..... or something like that.

"Yes, certainly. I'll make the preparations immediately! Someone, send word to the corporal!"

Earl Dimo caved against Lille's spirit and earnestly began to mobilize the cavalry as he ran into his mansion.

".....I can rely on you, right?"

Lille's eyes remained on the earl's shrinking figure as she asked a question nearly inaudible under the surrounding noise.

The anxiety and fear in her gray eyes caused a bit of guilt to spring up within me.

It was my words that put Lille in a position where she had to carry the burden of

an entire country on her small shoulders.

That's why it was necessary to cement our relationship here and now.

"Hmm, I know this is bad timing, but I think we should discuss the reward for this venture."

Tension built up in Lille's expression upon hearing my words.

I felt like a bad old man tricking a young girl but I needed to request what we needed while we still had the chance to do so.

"Th-That's so. Name your price for escorting me on these trips."

I was trying to answer her without letting my impatience slip out, so I suppressed my trembling hands and put on a dauntless façade.

But I had no intention of asking for money.

"First of all, the reward can only be paid upon our success. Once the capital is rescued we would like a tour of the royal treasury as the first part of our reward."

Lille had been prepared to hear the sum of our demand, so her eyes and the eyes of the guards bulged when they heard what we actually wanted, and they were naturally confused.

"Instead of any of the Soulia family's treasure, you want a tour of the treasury..... is that right?"

I nodded at Lille's question and gave her a brief answer.

"Yes, things will be settled as long as we can investigate the treasury."

I caught Chiome nodding her head in the corner of my eye after I said that.

"Understood, by my name, I shall grant you entrance into the treasury! so what is the other part?"

After granting us permission to enter the treasury Lille pressed for my next demand.

They had been so caught off guard by my light request, most of them didn't seem to remember the "first" part of that statement.

The relieved expression that Nina had after hearing the contents of my first request made it obvious that she missed it.

"The second part is for Nozan Kingdom to liberate all elves and beastmen currently held in captivity, and for severe punishment to be implemented for those that try to capture them in the future."

Not only were the two escorts surprised by my request, but so were Ariane and Chiome behind me.

Lille seemed to chew over the contents of the request for a bit but didn't seem to fully understand it before she replied.

Eventually, Lille nodded her head before answering with a large smile.

"You will obviously take responsibility for the people released that way, right? That's no prob—"

"Please wait! Princess Lille!!"

Just as Lille was about to agree to the demand, Nina spoke up to interrupt her.

"That demand is well beyond something anything Princess Lille can promise!"

Lille was curious about what Nina was talking about.

"Why's that? Arc is asking for us to hand over the elves and beastmen, right? Considering the country's situation, a decision like this should be easy to make."

"Princess, it's different! What he is asking our country for..... are the slaves!"

Unfortunately, the two didn't seem to be having the same conversation.

"Slaves? Aren't the only slaves the debt slaves, those imprisoned, and the prisoners of war?"

Nina flinched a little when Lille asked her that question.

I was able to grasp the circumstances based on their exchange.

“So there are no elven or beastmen slaves in your country... Is that how you see it?”

Nina ground her teeth but she didn't answer my question.

She didn't want to reveal the existence of elven and beastman slaves to Lille.

It may have been tacit agreement not to publicize the possession of elves and beastmen slaves, due to the influence of the Hiruku religion.

They already had the power to send Templars on beastmen hunts, so it's doctrine probably declared ownership of them and demanded they be handed over.

A difference in military capabilities alone wouldn't be able to explain their behavior.

“What's that!? Our country has the same policy as the Rhoden Kingdom. Elves and beastmen are not allowed to be taken as slaves!”

Lille seemed somewhat flustered as she looked between Nina and me.

Officially, there was no enslaved group of elves and beastmen for my condition to be applied to.

If that official statement was true, then my demand shouldn't cause any problem for Nozan Kingdom. All that accepting the demand meant was that the royal family would have to confiscate or simply purchase the illegal slaves and offer them to me.

I didn't know how many slaves the Hiruku Theocracy had in its possession, but given Nina's reaction the numbers was by no means small.

However, the continued denial of the slaves' existence meant that their treatment would worsen now that the kingdom was in peril.

The greatest asset during a siege was the defender's stockpile of food and water.

I didn't know the population of the capital, but it was necessary to limit

consumption when living off rationed food and it was the lower classes that usually received the short end of the stick.

And there the elven and beastmen slaves weren't even acknowledged to exist by the general populace.

Elves were rather expensive purchases as they were kept as pets or used to breed stronger descendants, while the physically endowed beastmen were primarily used as cheap labor.

There didn't seem to be a lot of room for negotiation this time, so I focused on the young princess and her two silent escorts.

I'll concede on my condition for now, given the circumstances.

"Hmm, if you say your Kingdom doesn't allow elven or beastmen slaves, then I would like that policy to be maintained in the future. However, no country is without scoundrels, no?"

The princess locked eyes with me as she seemed to understand the meaning behind my words.

Lille slowly opened her mouth and began speaking again.

"So you want the slaves of those who break the law to be confiscated and handed over to you and your people?"

She seems to have understood.

If there was indeed a policy in place the royal family had a righteous obligation to take the slaves from the corrupt nobility.

It was necessary to lend a hand here so that later on the nobles could see that the royal family was making the right decision.

Otherwise, the nobles might rebel and destroy the country, making all of our efforts meaningless.

After nodded at her question and extended my right hand.

Lille outstretched her small hand and grasped mine with all the strength she could muster.

Her two escorts behind her looked to be at their wit's end as their eyes traveled heavenward.

In order to fulfill our agreement and prove that her decision was the right one, I had to unveil some of my true power.

A smile seemed to form inside my helmet as that thought occurred to me.

The small princess really was sensitive to such things, as a small shudder ran through her body.

Chapter 16: Branier Territory

The remote Branier Territory of the eastern Salma Kingdom.

The land east of the Uiru river once belonged to the Nozan Kingdom.

Right now, this area was ruled by a noble from the Salma Kingdom, Margrave Branier's family.

It was a considerably large area for one house to rule over, but seventy years ago, the grandfather of the Branier family's current head was a Knight Commander who spearheaded the conquest, and due to his remarkable and distinguished service he was granted ownership of the land by the king of Salma Kingdom

However, the nobles from the capital loathed the former Knight Commander due to his commoner background and rapid rise, the farmland and the population had been devastated by the battle and any attempt at land expansion was met with retaliation from Nozan.

Still, the land originally consisted of gentle plains and was very rich despite the steady influx of monsters from the Sobiru Mountains. Public order grew under the knight corps' thorough protection and reconstruction continued, allowing the land to prosper.

Due to their efforts the Branier family had been raised to the ranks of nobility by the king and now stood as one of the kingdom's most powerful houses, though it was increasingly isolated from the other nobles.

In the center of the territory, ridiculed by other nobles as the "frontier", sat a castle that had been converted from mansion which had been standing in the region since it was under the Nozan Kingdom's control.

The castle was a bit different from a normal one as the originally elegant mansion was surrounded security walls and guards towers.

The castle reflected the uniqueness of the territory whose capital it was. A lone, elderly man sat in one of the mansion's large rooms, working on some paperwork at his desk.

There was little about the man that indicated his advanced age.

While his fine clothes were befitting for someone of his status, his well-toned physique was barely contained by them. The white mustache under his nose and his sharp eyes gave him a somewhat villainous appearance.

The only clear indicator of his age was the thinning gray hair atop his head.

This man's name was Wendelin De Branier.

He was the first heir of his family's territory, a Lord renewed for impeccable leadership and his continued suppression of Nozan Kingdom's assaults.

The only sound within the office was that of his pen scrawling across the page, so the quiet knock at the door stalled Margrave Branier's hand, making him look up from his work.

"Enter."

After receiving permission, a young woman opened the door and offered a curtsy before entering.

Her dress wasn't as extravagant as those usually found in noble society and her expression remained calm as she walked towards her Lord.

Normally, the women appearing in such a place were simple servants or the types who enjoyed to dress up, but this woman's mannerisms were more reminiscent of a secretary.

When Margrave Branier recognized who the woman was he lowered his pen and silently jerked his chin.

"Branier-sama, we received a rather worrisome report from the patrol guards a while ago."

"Hmm, what is it?"

A hard edge appeared in Margrave Branier's eyes as he began to twirl his mustache before jerking his chin again.

"Just southwest of here, local residents witnessed a carriage led by a guard detail being attacked by a monster that has never been seen before."

Margrave Branier raised an eyebrow at the statement.

It was a reasonable reaction from the Margrave as it was a common occurrence for Nozan Kingdom to send troops ahead in preparation for another attempt to reclaim the territory.

However, the next part of the report was different from how these things normally played out.

"The exact number guards was unknown, but we are certain there was only a single carriage. It's likely that the convoy was protecting a dignitary. The witnesses were unable to identify any coat of arms or family crest due to the distance between them and the group."

"Just southwest of here..... Was it a messenger from Rarisa? If so, then why? Have the whereabouts of the carriage and the monster been verified?"

Margrave Branier began stroking his chin and pressed the woman for more information regarding the situation.

"Yes, the carriage was reportedly traveling east from there, so a search party was sent to investigate. The wreckage of the carriage and the bodies of a few guards were discovered. However, the body of the carriage's occupant was never found and it's likely they managed to escape. As for the monster, a simple sketch was prepared based on the witness' descriptions of it."

The secretary-like woman pulled out a parchment and handed it over to Margrave Branier, who proceeded to examine the strange figure drawn on it.

"The upper body of a human and the lower body of a spider..... what is this? Are those four arms and two head? Is it a new type of monster..... no, even still....."

Margrave Burnett groaned as he examined the image on the page before placing

it on his desk and looking up at the secretary.

“Were the slain guards identified?”

“No, although the report said that the quality of their equipment was impressive, they didn’t carry any identifying items.”

The woman closed her mouth after answering his questions and awaited his instructions.

“It’s suspicious that they didn’t carry anything to identify themselves. If it had been a noble from the capital, what would be the point of hiding their identity.....? No dignitary would act in such a manner.”

Margrave Branier muttered to himself in order to arrange his thoughts and it wasn’t long before he realized something and slicked back his thinning hair.

“.....Maybe someone from Nozan Kingdom tried to enter Dimo Earldom? But why? They could have sailed across the Clyde gulf, so why take the risk of using the land route? No, the details can be inferred later.”

Margrave Branier stroked his mustache once more before he started giving instructions to the secretary-like woman.

“We will look into the whereabouts of the convoy’s survivors later, for now organize a subjugation force to deal with the unidentified monster! There is a possibility that a village was destroyed in their attempt to escape the monster. Dispatch six platoons to the southern area, make sure all units stay in contact with each other as they search the area!”

The secretary-like woman spoke a small acknowledgment of the Margrave’s orders.

“Understood, I’ll inform the knights immediately.”

She bowed after saying so and immediately left the room.

After watching her leave Margrave Branier slowly stood up, walked over to the large glass window in his office and took a look outside.

“.....Just what’s happening in Nozan Kingdom?”

Branier asked that question to no one in particular as he glanced over the well-maintained garden outside the window.

Chapter 17: Reinforcements Arc

“Is this alright?”

We were currently borrowing one of the rooms in the mansion of Keen’s feudal lord. Princess Lille was sitting behind a large desk as the contract specifying the rewards for this job was drawn up.

After looking over the contract I confirmed that everything was in order.

“These are the conditioned we discussed a while ago.”

One of the people beside me glanced at the contents and nodded their head.

After Ariane looked over the contract she started to whisper something in my ear.

(Do you really believe that a small child’s promise will be fulfilled? Even if she herself wants to hold up her end of the bargain, I doubt she has the power to do so)

She cast a suspicious glance towards Lille escorts, Nina and Zahar, that were currently flanking her side.

I couldn’t deny that she had a point.

While the conditions set had been accurately recorded, whether or not Lille was capable of fulfilling them was up in the air.

(You have a point Ariane-dono, I also doubt that our demands will be met completely.)

Ariane made a dubious expression when I replied to her.

I couldn’t deny the uncertainty that a country deeply-rooted in the Hiruku religion’s doctrine wouldn’t violate its contract with Ariane, Chiome, and I.

(Then, why are you having a contract written up?)

Ariane raised an eyebrow and expressed her dissatisfaction at me.

As long as we held a contract written by royal hands, I imagine we could get the opposition to partially hold up their end of the bargain.

Above all else, the best way to request a favor is to.....

(The contract proves that an agreement was made in advance when we make a show of strength similar to those of the Hiruku Theocracy)

In the corner of the room, Chiome reacted to my remark.

Her cat ears did a little pitter-patter when I made that comment.

On top of my head, Ponta's normally stationary ears did a similar pitter-patter to Chiome's.

The only person that reacted differently was Ariane, who looked puzzled as she stared at me.

(The Theocracy demonstrates their military might by having their holy knights intervene in the conflicts of the other countries. We elves shall showcase our own strength and warn others not to underestimate us.)

Ariane was openly distraught when she heard my explanation.

(Are you even thinking this through?)

While she obviously wanted to continue the conversation, Lille had finished signing the contract and interrupted us by presenting me the contract.

"I have given my signature. The agreement will be finalized once you sign it."

The contract was presented to me after she said that and I turned toward Ariane.

She looked confused as she stared back at me.

"This should be a good place for Ariane-dono to sign"

The eyes of those on Nozan's side, including Lille's, were all directed at a confused Ariane, who glared at me in return.

(Wait, Arc. Why do I have to sign it!?)

I offered Ariane a brief explanation in a measured but strong tone, all the while avoiding her glare.

"As the newest member, I'm still at the bottom of the village ranking, that's why Ariane is more qualified as our representative."

Ariane and Lille both stared at me when they heard my remark.

There was a slight sliver of surprise in their eyes.

She probably assumed that I was our group's representative, but it wasn't that long ago that I joined Raratoia. In terms of elven society, Ariane was leagues above me.

And above all else, I couldn't actually write in the language of this world.

While I could understand the meaning of the words I looked at, you needed to know the alphabet and grammar.

This might be a problem later down the line.

Ariane let out a large sigh when she saw the look on the princess's face and reluctantly signed the contract.

"Is this good?"

After Ariane asked Lille read over the contract and nodded.

"Yes, with this negotiations are complete, Ariane-dono, Arc-dono and Chiome-dono. I believe that the promise to save my country shall be fulfilled?"

Ariane looked a bit uncomfortable and shrugged her shoulder as Lille's big gray eyes focused on her.

I nodded in response to Lille's question once I received the contract from her.

“Don’t worry, Lille-dono. We will tirelessly work to rescue Nozan’s capital from the undead horde. All Lille-dono has to do is prepare our reward.”

Lille released a small breath of relief once she heard my words.

Nina, who’d silently watched the proceedings until now, looked in my direction and opened her mouth to ask a question.

“Assuming we manage to enter the capital, there will be many injured there..... will you administer the same kind of healing magic you used on me?”

When Nina asked that question, she was stroking her arm that had been cut off by the spider chimera before I seamlessly reattached it.

Using too much of healing magic may cause troubled in the future, and there’s also a limit on how much I damage I can heal with my magic depending on the number of people.

Even though I possessed a large amount of mana I couldn’t help an absurd number of people..... I considered all of these things before answering her question.

“As long as it’s within my power..... I promise to provide adequate treatment.”

She breathed a relieved sigh and gave me a small nod.

Of course, I’d already thought of this option.

Even if it’s the work of a different race, those that adhered to the Hiruke doctrine wouldn’t immediately be able to mistreat those with healing magic in a dire situation.

Though it was impossible to extinguish prejudice, promoting tolerance or goodwill towards other races in a small group of people would be a satisfactory result.

As I internally praised myself for the level of coverage my plan had, a servant entered the room and delivered a message.

“Princess Lille, the Earl wishes to inform you that the cavalry is ready.”

“I understand, please tell them we shall arrive soon.”

When she heard the message from Earl Dimo, Lille leaped to her feet and turned to her two personal escorts, looking at Nina in particular.

“Your complexion doesn’t look too good, Nina. Would you like to stay behind?”

There was a hint of worry for her guard in Lille’s expression.

Nina’s complexion was as bad as Lille said. She’d lost a lot of blood when her arm was cut off.

My healing magic lacks the ability to restore lost blood.

Despite our short acquaintanceship, however, I already had a grasp on her personality.

Nina shook her head before kneeling in front of Lille.

“No. If I were to stay here while Princess Lille returned to the capital, even under your command, I would not be able to accept it!”

Nina’s strong will and stubbornness were transmitted to the princess through her words.

While Lille had a worried expression on her face, I could see a hint of joy within her eyes.

“There’s no choice then. let us prepare to set off.”

There was a smile on Lille face as she said that, and it remained there as she started strapping a set of elegantly designed leather armor over her dress.

I guess this was standard for royalty?

Although the armor was well put together, unlike Zahar’s and Nina’s armor, it didn’t seem capable of withstanding much damage.

However, it was better than nothing.

When Lille left the office, her two guards followed behind her.

Ariane, Chiome and I exchanged glances with one another as we stayed behind.

Ariane was the first to speak up, though her voice was rather weaker than normal.

“..... this may be just like usual, but it feels like there’ve been some strange developments.”

“Kyun?”

On top my head, Ponta seemed confused by Ariane’s grievances.

Chiome spoke up in an apologetic when she heard Ariane’s statement.

“The request I asked for is the source if our current situation.....”

Ariane immediately shook her head and tried to ease Chiome’s worries.

“I’m not blaming you Chiome-chan, it’s just that I’m not a representative of my village and I just exchanged an absurd promise with a human country..... don’t you see?”

Ariane looked a bit troubled as she spoke and looked towards me.

The sense of reluctance in her gaze was almost audible.

“It’s just a private contract between us and Nozan Kingdom. Canada and the village won’t be bothered by it. In any case, the rewards stipulated in this contract are dependent on the success on our part. You won’t lose anything if we fail to hold up our end of the deal.”

“I guess so.....”

Even though she wasn’t completely satisfied by my explanation, I could see the strength return to her eyes after she let out a large sigh.

“But, even if we fail, we can still get into the royal treasury, right?”

Besides me, Chiome vigorously nodded her head at the idea of following Sasuke’s footsteps.

“Well, we should also get going.”

Saying only that, I stood up and followed after Lille’s group.

When we reached the mansion’s large front yard, we were greeted by one hundred mounted cavalrymen.

Each rider sat firmly in their saddle and wore a matching set of armor.

Under the light of day the cavalrymen seemed to dazzle and shine, Princess Lille nodded her head as she glanced over their spectacular appearance.

However, though these hundred cavalrymen seemed brave and competent, they would be consumed by the murky stream of the hundred thousand undead we would face.

Earl Dimo must have not told them the purpose for this unit’s formation because all of the cavalrymen had a triumphant look on their face.

Well, I suppose telling them of the sheer scale of the enemy they would be facing would frighten them off. If all of them fled it would be a disgrace to the Earl’s honor and Lille’s guards wouldn’t let us past Fort Hill, so I guess it wasn’t a bad decision.

When Lille and her guards entered the front yard everyone went quiet, only the hoof beats of the horses could be heard.

Earl Dimo, the ruler of this territory, soon arrived at Lille’s side.

“All of you, rejoice! Today, this territory’s cavalry has been given a glorious mission! You shall be escorting Princess Lille on her return trip to the capital! Proceed with caution!”

The cavalrymen straightened their posture upon hearing the Earl’s speech.

Once the Earl’s speech was finished, Zahar surveyed the group before he began his.

“You have been informed of the contents of your mission, we must cross the Salma Kingdom as quickly as possible! We will reach Fort Hill tonight and start

to traverse the Burnett territory in the morning! Certain factors will make this a tough journey, but those who fall behind will be abandoned! Proceed with caution!”

His explanation caused a momentary outburst, but Zahar ignored them and gave the signal to set off for Fort Hill.

“Dimo Cavalry, to Fort Hill! These are the instruction the Earl has written for the fort commander.”

Zahar handed a rolled-up parchment sealed with wax to one of the mounted soldiers and saluted them before they set off.

Lille would be riding along with Nana, so the guards she brought formed a defensive formation around them as they awaited Zahar’s orders.

Before taking the lead position, Zahar turned towards us as we watched them prepare.

“We will return to Fort Hill. Arc-dono, bring up the rear.”

“Alright.”

After hearing my reply, Zahar moved to where Lille was waiting.

I looked around and found a giant reddish figure resting in the corner of the garden.

I saw Shiden pressing his snout in-between his legs as I approached. All around him the grass had vanished and the soil had been dug up.

When Shiden noticed me, he raised his head with something still in his mouth.

It seems like he’d made a snack out of the garden.

The garden had been ruined, obviously, so we’d best leave before the Earl’s generosity ran out.

“Let’s go, Shiden.”

“Giyuriiiin!”

Once I'd finished strapping the saddle on Shiden's back, he stood up and let out a spirited roar.

The Earl's servants simultaneously fell on their butts when they saw this.

To ordinary people, he must have seemed like a dangerous dragon or a savage beast, but he was quite loyal to his master.

Chiome sat in the front and Ariane behind me as we saddled up.

Once Ponta slipped into her new favorite spot in Shiden's mane I took hold of the reins.

When Lille's group left out the mansion's gate and entered Keen's residential area, Shiden slowly followed behind them.

I confirmed the position of the sun and calculated the time until we reach the fort.

"We'll arrive sometime in the evening....."

When I turned away from the sun and focused on the line of people ahead of us, I noticed that Chiome was looking up at me.

While she opened her mouth she didn't say anything, only nodding her head.

"Well, it's time to go."

While the city guards were keeping the streets clear of traffic, people flocked around us for a chance to catch a glance of Lille's group. It felt like being part of a small parade.

All eyes were on us until we finally left the city behind.

Dimo's mounted soldiers were full of fighting spirit as they led the way, or at least that was what it looked like from my position at the rear.

Actually, it was a mistake to put us at the rear of the group, we couldn't overtake Lille's group, so I intentionally limited our speed.

Thinking back to the Giant Basilisk I once encountered, I wondered if having six

legs really increased one's mobility?

My eyes focused on the scenery as my mind pondered over the intricacies of this world.

The scenic view of the farmland spread to my left and right, with farmers looking up when they heard the hoofbeats of our group.

Eventually, Fort Hill's massive defensive wall came into view.

I wonder why I felt a bit nostalgic even though just half a day had passed since the last time we had been here.

The fort's gate gradually began to open after the preceding cavalry raised a flag embroiled with the Earl's family crest.

"This should be today's destination, right? We can finally rest....."

Ariane let out a relieved sigh as she voiced her complaints.

An exhausted Ponta was sprawled across Shiden's head.

That reminds me, we didn't eat lunch today.....

While that thought was crossing my mind, the cavalry had already vanished into the fort. Once Lille's group and ours passed it, the gate was closed once more.

The one I assumed to be the cavalry's leader met with Fort Hill's commander and discussed the contents of the Earl's letter. Meanwhile it became noisy around Lille's group,

"Hold on, Nina!"

The main source of the commotion was Lille, when I turned towards them I saw that Nina's complexion had worsened and she was on the verge of falling off her horse.

"Take her somewhere to rest! Quickly!"

Zahar immediately took charge of the situation.

Following his orders, two of the nearby guards helped her off her horse and led her away.

Lille was rather anxious about the whole thing, when she noticed my stare she came to plead with me.

“Arc-dono, please examine Nina!”

“I don’t mind doing so, but Nina is most likely still anemic. I don’t think there’s any way for her to recover besides bedrest and a steady diet.”

I dismounted Shiden as I replied to the princess, but she still directed her worried face at me.

When I saw a few droplets forming in the corner of her eyes I give in and nodded my head.

“Alright, I’ll cast healing magic and see how things go from there…….”

Happiness bloomed on her face when I said that.

Seeing that exchange play out put a smile on Ariane’s face as she started mocking me.

“So, you’re weak to the tears of small children, Arc?”

“I don’t want to hear that coming from you, Ariane-dono.”

Ariane looked away and pretended to ignore me at my comeback.

It would have been for the best to have Nina rest for a couple of days, but her pride wouldn’t allow her to leave Lille’s side.

I could try to force her to rest by chopping the back of her neck whenever she woke up, but it would be really bad if I accidentally decapitated her.

I suppose I could cast Revitalization or Rejuvenation, but I never tried either of them before or seen their effects on another person.

“I guess I’m a magic doctor venturing into the bush.”

Sunset was already upon us and I narrowed my eyes at the red glimmer of the sky as bonfires started going up around the fort.

If all went according to plan, we'd pass through the Salma Kingdom in about two days, but could we adhere to the schedule without incident.

I cleared my mind with a shake of my head, as thinking unnecessary thought like that only became omens.

Chapter 18: The Margrave's Forces Face Opposition

The Branier Territory of the Salma Kingdom.

Monsters lurked inside Ildoba Forest in the north, the elves of Rouen Forest prevented humans from entering and Fort Hill's boundary wall sealed off Nozan's Dimo Earldom in the south.

Due to these obstructions, the number of villages in this southeastern area was almost nonexistent despite consisting of wide and hilly lands as far as the eye could see, completely different from the cultivated areas around the Uiru River.

Thirty armed soldiers were currently patrolling this hilly area.

The group preceded two wagons that bore the Margrave Branier's crest on their raised flags.

The wagons were loaded down with bags of food, extra weapons, and pavise shields. The soldiers guarding the wagons carried spears and constantly survived their surroundings.

They were one of the platoons dispatched from the capital of Branier territory, as per the Margrave's orders, they were searching the area for the mysterious group and their unknown, monstrous pursuers.

A middle-aged man on horseback, who seemed to be leading the unit, was surveying the area.

"An unidentified, armed force, I was told it was related to a Nozan official. They should have headed this way..... but there's no sign of them.

When the commander muttered that with a sigh, the young man nearby nodded his head in agreement.

"Maybe the platoon assigned to the district south of here managed to find something. We haven't found any evidence of the rumored monster either."

The young man was the adjutant to the platoon's commander, he carried a shield on his back and rode his horse beside the commander's in case of emergency.

"I'd like the credit for it, but I'd rather not run into them while they're being chased by that monster....."

Saying that, the commander pulled the parchment he had received during the briefing from his breast pocket and scrunched his eyebrows as he looked at the sketch of the never seen before monster.

"Does such a strange monster really exist?"

The adjutant let out a dry laugh at the commander's complaint and looked at the Pavise shields on the wagon behind them.

"Being issued the subjugation equipment for huge monsters, the fact that this beast has never been seen before, plus the platoon's size all have me a bit worried."

The commander gave a cheerful smile at the adjunct's worries.

"There's a group trailing behind us, right? In the case of us being annihilated, the messenger will retreat quickly, so it's alright."

The adjutant shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as the commander loudly laughed.

A cautious shout from the rear of the platoon interrupted the two's conversation.

"A mysterious shadow approaching from the north! I repeat! A mysterious shadow approaching from the north!"

Every soldier simultaneously turned their heads northwards.

In front of the soldiers, the ground formed a slight slope and a deformed creature running as fast as a galloping horse entered the commander's line of sight.

Its appearance was just as it had been depicted in the sketch. With its two heads and four arms, its upper body appeared as if two humans had been fused together while its lower body was that of a spider..... a figure that could only

be described as deformed.

However, the features not drawn on the sketch caused the commander and soldiers to choke up and their eyes to budge.

The commander believed the creature to be a new type of monster, but the metal armor that covered its humanoid chest, the two shields it carried in one set of arms, and the two large claymores it carried made him doubtful of that.

The commander had encountered many humanoid monsters before, goblins, orcs and even the most dangerous of humanoid monsters: the Minotaur. The weapons they carried didn't go beyond clubs, fallen branches or dull and rusted weapons that had been stolen from humans. Tactics and well-maintained equipment were the only advantages humans had over the physically superior monsters.

However, neither the armor nor the metal shields of the deformed human-spider hybrid showed any sign of rust and the blade of its swords had a decent shine to them. Humanity's greatest fear, monsters capable of turning their greatest advantage against them, had manifested in front of them.

"That!? What is the world in that thing!? How can a monster use the same weapons as a human!?"

The adjutant's frantic shout returned the commander to his senses.

"Don't be discouraged!! Now is not the time to be thinking about that!! Everyone battle positions! Form the rhombus formation!! Deploy the shield corps immediately!!"

The confused soldiers immediately sprung into action at the commander's orders.

Taking hold of the monster subjugation shields loaded on one of the wagons, the soldiers organized a defensive wall against the deformed monster.

"Spear wielders prepare your lances in-between the shield bearers! Prepare for impact!! Archers restrict the monster's movements!!"

"Archers, fire!!"

When the adjutant signaled for the volley, several people behind the shield bearer loosed their arrows in a high arc.

None of the arrows hit the charging monster, falling on both sides of the monster instead.

The archers continued firing arrows one after another, leading the monster down one path.

Once the deformed monster was within striking distance of the platoon, the adjunct issued more orders.

“Now!!”

In response to the order, spears were thrust towards the monster from the shadow of the shield bearers.

Dull metallic impacts rang out as the deformed monster reacted like a human would and blocked the spears with its shields.

However, even if though its shields were rather large, the monster was the size of a minotaur and therefore it was impossible for it to completely protect its spider lower half.

The monster’s running speed and the positioning of the soldiers allowed a few of the spears to pierce the spider-like lower body. An unnerving hellish yell sprung from the monster’s mouths.

Ugguuuuuaaaaaaaaaa!!! Insects, kill!!!!

A shock ran through the soldiers and commander when they heard the deformed monster’s agonized shout.

They had never seen a monster capable of human speech before, the only thing that came close were the devils from fairytales, and the possibility that this monster could be one terrified them.

However, there wasn’t time for fear to consume them. Most of the spears had shattered upon colliding with the monster’s shields, and the monster descended on the shield bearers.

The platoon fell into chaos as the smell of blood, the sound of shattering of bone, and frightened shouts enveloped the area.

“Regain your posture!! Use the shields to hold the monster back!! Aim the spears at its legs!!”

The commander ordered his men to focus their attack on the exposed lower body rather than the armored human torso.

While he didn't know much damage managed to get through in the last collision, he knew there was no margin for more casualties on their side.

When the shield bearers tried to suppress the monster's movements they would be sent flying, pavisé and all.

However, the spear wielders desperately threw their whole weight into their thrusts at the spider section of the monster. The soldiers were covered in black as the dissolved, charcoal-like liquid sprayed out from the monster's wounds.

The deformed monster's power would result in multiple casualties within the platoon, but the scratches they left would become fatal so long as they kept it up.

Then another of his soldiers shouted another observation.

“Movement in the northwest!! There's another one!!!”

The commander took his eyes off the ongoing battle and scanned the area northwest of their position.

He caught sight of the figure.

The ridge was slightly elevated over there and another creature revealed itself, releasing a roar when it located the ongoing fight.

Just one of the deformed monsters was enough to destroy half of the platoon, it was clear what the results would be if another one were to join the fray.

“Shit!!”

The moment the curse was spoken the deformed monster skillfully began

running down the slope with its spider legs.

The joke he made with adjutant may, in fact, become reality..... the commander began to grind his teeth as the image of his family flashed before his eyes.

However, yet another soldier shouted a report.

“A large cloud of dust has been spotted in the south!! Mounted soldiers of unknown origins!! More than a hundred riders!!”

“What!?”

Both the commander and his adjutant turned around when they heard that.

The hundred cavalymen took great pains to avoid the current battle as they ran through the plain.

Given the course they were taking, they certainly weren't reinforcements, but it was impossible to determine the intentions of the other party in this confusing situation.

However, the commander's intuition told him that they were related to the missing group they'd been informed of.

The eyewitnesses had reported a single carriage and a few guards, but group was ten times that size.

The neighboring Dimo Earldom was capable of fielding a cavalry of this size, but why would they appear in the middle of the Branier territory..... The mysterious monsters in front and behind him, combined with their appearance birth a bizarre answer in his mind.

..... Could these monsters belong to Nozan Kingdom?

They'd made deals with ancient devils..... the commander even wanted to mock himself for such a fairytale-like conclusion.

..... it was simply foolish.

If that had been the case, they would just annihilate the platoon with a pincer

attack. The rational part of the commander's brain dismissed the absurd idea, seeing as they were already on the verge of defeat.

“Unidentified horseman approaching our location!!”

The commander was lost in thought when he received the final report from one of his subordinates.

The commander's eyes bulged and he audibly sucked in a breath when he saw the horseman approaching.

“What is that thing.....”

Chapter 19: Crisis in The Capital

Soulia, the capital of Nozan Kingdom.

The city's forces were under siege by an army of undead.

Day after day, the noise continued as one hundred thousand undead continuously tried to break through the outer city's walls, some even using other undead as footing to reach the top of the wall.

Undead were supposed to grow stronger at night so the defenders were always on high alert. However, for some reason the undead would cease their attacks and simply wander around the surrounding fields and plain.

At first, this sudden shift in behavior was suspected to be a trap, but after the second and third time it happened, it seemed more like a restriction on the enemy's part.

However, just because the threat of combating the undead horde at night had lowered, it wasn't all that much to be optimistic about.

That was due to the existence of the spider-human-hybrids that were mixed within the undead horde, since even at night some of them would attack the capital.

On multiple occasion, the deformed monsters had been observed smashing the undead that wandered too far away at night, ensuring that the opposition against the capital persisted.

While the spider-human-monsters weren't all that numerous compared to the undead wandering about, the superior mobility their spider legs provided and their unmatched strength made them the most dangerous beings in this siege.

Entering the city inside the outer walls, where the battle took place, one found that most streets eventually lead to the inner walls.

The inner walls had once been the extent of Soulia's borders, but expansions to

the city facilitated the need for the newer, outer wall.

Should an invader manage to break through the outer wall, the inner wall would be used as the last line of defense, thus the inner wall was maintained to this day.

Within the old city district, near the inner wall, stood a cubical tower that the guards used as their office in peace times.

The present siege had enveloped the entire city, and the highest authority in the country, King Asparuf Nozan Soulia, and his advisors currently occupied a small room in the building, looking over a map of the entire capital.

King Asparuf was the first to break the gloomy silence that permeated the entire room.

“..... How many days has it been since we sent for reinforcements?”

The undead horde’s ever present assault had begun to effect the King’s sense of time, so he directed the question towards the Prime Minister.

“..... If I’m not mistaken, it has been seven days.”

The King signed and began massaging the wrinkles on his forehead upon hearing the Prime Minister’s reply.

“Seven days..... even if we assume the princes easily acquired the necessary reinforcements, it will still take them several days to return..... Cardinal Liberalitas seemed to have dispatched a messenger to the Theocracy, but it will take even longer for them to arrive.”

“.....”

The Prime Minister’s own wrinkles deepened at the King’s words.

Attempting to lighten the mood, the King changed topics.

“How is the relocation of the residents near the inner wall going?”

“It’s ei-, no, nine tenths of the way completed.....”

The Prime Minister pointed out the houses just beyond the inner wall on the map

as he spoke.

Should the outer wall fall the newer part of the city would become a battlefield, the major problem with that situation were the buildings that had been built in close vicinity to the inner wall.

The shuffling undead soldiers weren't much of an issue, but the agile and deformed spiders would be able to use those buildings as a platform to leap into the inner city, so drastic countermeasures had to be taken.

While the residents of the area bore a grudge for the destruction of their homes, their grievances were trifles in the face of the country's potential demise.

"The beastmen slaves tasked with the demolition seemed to be progressing ahead of schedule thanks to their zeal and impressive physical abilities."

King Asparuf nodded his head vigorously at the Prime Minister's hopeful tone.

"It was a large gamble to utilize them, but they also fear being overwhelmed and killed by the undead..... The food distribution also seems to help."

"That's right, however... protests from the church are inevitable should we overcome this crisis..... A cardinal is within the city, so there's no hiding it."

It took a bit of convincing to get the residents and slave owners to sell their assets to the crown, but traditional means wouldn't work in this situation. Even if every citizen took part in the demolition, there wouldn't have been enough hands for the task.

There was a fear that the slaves would revolt because of the working conditions and the kingdom's status quo, but survival instinct and the degree of freedom allowed to them ensured their cooperation.

However, the possession of beastmen slaves stood was a blatant disregard of the Hiruku religion's doctrine, if the cardinal discovered them the Theocracy would demand the slaves be handed over to them.

"It's all for our country's sake....."

The Prime Minister signed and nodded at King Asparuf's statement.

“While it’s not really a consolation, and many would find it deplorable, it might be a good thing that the enemies are undead.....”

The King gave the Prime Minister a strange look when he heard his utterance.

“Why is that?”

“Since the enemy is an army of undead, the people of the capital are all united against them. We would be at an even greater disadvantage if they were a normal, foreign, standing army because traitors would definitely appear.”

The King’s dark smile deepened at the Prime Minister’s words.

It was something which had occurred repeatedly throughout the country’s long history.

Times when a castle had been left in the hands of a trusted friend, only for that person to defect to the enemy’s side..... such stories were too numerous to count.

“Certainly..... since people are desperately trying to survive, there hasn’t been too much resistance against the beastmen slaves. I guess it really is good fortune that they’re undead.”

The King chuckled a bit as he spoke.

A loud noise outside caught the attention of the two men, when they quizzically looked towards the source, a messenger who literally stumbled into the room.

Under normal circumstances, the Prime Minister wouldn’t allow such rude behavior in front of the King, but now was not the time to worry about such formalities.

“What happened!?”

The messenger knelt before the Prime Minister and answered his brief question.

“The outer walls, a section of the southern gate has collapsed! They have broken through!!”

The King leaped to his feet and knocked his chair back to the ground upon hearing the message.

“All units are to fall back and attempt to limit the casualties!! Instruct the citizens to immediately retreat behind the inner walls!! Hurry!”

The surrounding people and messengers simultaneously acted upon the King's orders.

The King's and the Prime Minister's eye dropped to the map in front of them, specifically on the locations where the demolition hadn't been completed.

.....There wasn't enough time.

The King clenched his teeth with enough power to crack molars.

Chapter 20: Encounter

Puffs of white breath left the horses' mouths.

The moon and innumerable stars filled the calm night sky, and dawn was far from arriving.

The Dimo Earldom's cavalrymen were all gathered in Fort Hill's courtyard to witness this midnight scenery.

As a result of the pre-departure tension, the sounds of people whispering amongst themselves and armor rubbing against itself were mixed with the hoof beats of the horses.

Fort Hill's gate, the gate which led to Salma Kingdom and was almost never opened, slowly began to open on a quiet morning.

"Ha!"

The man at the head of the cavalry gave the signal as he dug his heels into his horse's sides, vanishing beyond the opened gate.

The remaining one hundred cavalrymen whipped their horses and started after their leader. Lille quietly watched their departure before her escort Nina signaled the other guards.

Under the lighting provided by the bonfires around Fort Hill, Nina's complexion showed no signs of worsening.

That wasn't to say that my healing magic was the solitary reason for that, after I cast the spell on her Nina devoured any food she could get a hold of, attempting to accelerate her blood production.

Remembering the ghastly appearance of her scarfing down food caused a shudder to run down my spine.

"Kyun?"

When Ponta gave me a worried look I shook my head at her.

Even an adult man would be done in by such a meal.... My gaze wandered between the yawning Ariane behind me and Chiome in front of me. There were a lot of sturdy women in this world though.

“Arc, did you just think of something inappropriate?”

Her golden eyes peered over my shoulder, waiting for an explanation to the slight shift in my gaze.

I was a skeleton and wearing armor..... how could she tell what I was thinking?

Was it the result of reading your opposites movements in combat?There wasn't any point in worrying about it now, so I pulled Shiden's reins and started after the princess's group.

“Let's go.”

“Giriiiin!” “Kyun ☆”

I ignored Ariane's question and told Shiden to get going. Shiden's large body shook once as he roared, Ponta also cried out when she slid down Shiden's neck and struggled to right herself.

Chiome grabbed Ponta by the scruff of her neck and held the little creature to her chest.

Although Ponta restlessly wagged her tail she remained silent about the whole thing.

Without any street lamps to guide our way, we traversed the plains that lead to Nozan Kingdom.....

Blades of grass were uprooted and tossed to the wind in the wake of cavalry and us.

When I looked back, the walls of Fort Hill, which extended to the horizon, were completely consumed by the world's shadow.

Sunlight had gradually begun to pierce the horizon to our right, with the blackness of the ground beneath us giving way to a green hue.

Though we had to take several breaks to let the horses rest, we'd been passing through Salma Kingdom without incident.

"This is going surprisingly well."

It was around noon, we had just finished letting the horses take another rest and our light lunch of preserved food.

Ariane's gray cloak fluttered in the wind on the back of the saddle as she muttered her thought with a yawn.

The changes to the landscape hadn't gone unnoticed since the gentle incline had gradually given way to modest hills.

..... Now, where were we going?

Sitting atop Shiden, I looked up at a bird flying in the sky as careless thoughts crossed my mind.

Things started to get noisy when one of the cavalymen spotted something.

"What is it?"

Ariane stared straight ahead when I asked that question.

"I see it! It's one of those undead creatures!"

Chiome's ears did a little pitter-patter in response to her shout.

".....Another one is also approaching them from behind. Are they more of the Princess's pursuers?"

Chiome straightened her posture and narrowed her eyes as she spoke.

When I strained my eyes, I immediately caught sight of soldiers, flying a banner with an unknown insignia, in the middle of combating one of those spider-chimeras.

“Perhaps..... the soldiers belong to Salma Kingdom?”

It seems that a unit of the Salman army had stumbled upon the chimera trying to sneak around in the hilly area, resulting in the current battle.

While our position gave us a good view, the other parties could see us if they tried.

However, the soldiers had their hands full fighting the spider-chimera and they couldn't afford to deal with us.

The Dimo cavalry must have realized this fact as well, because they made a slight change in their course.

They were just gonna pass the whole thing by.

It was a rational decision to make, considering that we disregarded the border of a hostile nation.

However.....

“At this rate, the soldier will be annihilated.....”

Half of the Salman soldiers had already died, the other half was struggling as is, and yet another spider-chimera was approaching their rear.

They had no way of dealing with this.

As I thought the situation over, Lille's group suddenly lowered their speed to the point that they ran beside us.

“What is it, Nina-dono!?”

I yelled to get my question to be audible over the horses, but she still glanced down at Lille before replying.

“Arc-dono! Princess Lille has a request!!”

Following her statement, the small girl began shouting at the top of her lungs.

“Arc-dono! I am truly sorry, but I ask that you protect the Branier soldiers and

subdue the monsters!”

The two people I was sandwiched between snapped their heads towards the small girl when they heard what she asked for.

“Lille-dono, are they not your enemies?”

“That is correct! However, I can’t just leave those people in a situation like this!”

Lille acknowledged the circumstances but still appealed for me to rescue the soldiers.

“There’s not a lot of time to think it over!”

Despite not being able to decipher their true intentions, Ariane’s warning had me nodding at Lille and placing a hand over my sword’s hilt.

“Very well! Let’s go and work off our last meal!”

With one tug on Shiden’s reins, he immediately understood my intentions and started chasing the chimera running down the hill.

“Giyuriiiiin!!”

Shiden increased his speed once he was directly behind the spider chimera, roaring as he did so.

I quickly drew my sword, which had been tied to Shiden’s saddle, from its sheath and used the stirrups as a foothold to stand, all while grasping the reins in one hand and my sword in the other.

“Chiome-dono, please lower your head!!”

When she realized what I was going to do, she lowered her head and clung to Shinden’s back.

“Flying Dragon Slash!!”

A wave of light was sent flying from my sword’s edge, beautifully severing a few of the monster’s legs.

Gugiyaaaaaaaaaaaaauuuuu!!!

The Spider Chimera's balance was shattered due to the loss of its legs and its two heads released a gruff scream as it tumbled down the hill.

Shiden pushed his six legs harder, lowered his horns and sent the spider-chimera flying upon impact.

The spider-chimera's shields and swords were sent flying through the air and several of its body parts were torn off by the high-speed collision.

Accompanied by the dreadful sound of bones shattering and grinding, the spider chimera was reduced to an injured insect.

As we passed it by my companions mercilessly attacked the wounded monster.

—Stone and Rock, grind my enemies to dust—

When Ariane invoked her spirit magic, a mass of rocks materialized in the air and started flying at the monster.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Ponta created razor sharp blades of wind that managed to put light scratches on the chimera's skin.

Water Style: Water Spear!!

After forming her hand signs, a lump of water condensed in her hand before taking the shape of a spear. With as much strength as she could muster, Chiome thrust the spear into the spider chimera.

After such an assault, the monster's body dissolved into nothing and all that remained were the black stains of its spilled blood.

“Kyun!”

Chiome silently stroked Ponta's head, while the little fox proudly wagged her tail back and forth.

I glanced at the remains of the spider-monster for a brief moment before

redirecting Shiden.

Sheathing my sword I sat back down and took hold of the reins once more.

When a sudden movement caught my attention, I turned my head just in time to see the Branier soldiers deliver the decisive blow to the spider chimera.

After directing Shiden in a large arc around the soldiers, we returned to the course that Lille's group was taking.

Along the way, I briefly locked eyes with the person who seemed to be their commander, but hadn't fully grasped what had just happened.

It was convenient for us though.

It's better to put some distance between us before they regained their senses.

Although, keeping their current condition in mind they wouldn't be able to pursue us immediately.

The injured would definitely slow the soldiers down if they wanted to pursue us, even if the commander attempted a chase it would take at least a day or two before he could do so.

"With this, Princess Lille's errand is completed."

The soldiers disappeared behind us when I tightened my hold on Shiden's reins.

"Just what was her reasoning behind that?"

Chiome was lost in her own thoughts when she asked that question, she even started to pinch Ponta as she pondered it over.

"Kyun."

With an unhappy tone, Ponta voiced her displeasure at such a treatment.

She's probably doing that unconsciously, so please be patient..... after pleading with Ponta in my heart, Shiden increased his speed to catch up with Lille's group.

Chapter 21: Full March

With Shinden's six legged speed, it was easy to catch up to Lille's group.

I lost sight of Lille and the others when we went to fight the spider chimera and instead of relying on my terrible sense of direction, Shiden used his powerful nose to find and track them down.

No doubt automatic tracking came standard in dragon mounts, making the prospect of losing Shiden even more frightening.

Nina and Lille pulled beside us again while I was thinking about such unnecessary things.

"How was it? Were you able to rescue the soldiers?"

I nodded my head at Lille's question before asking her a question of my own.

"I asked this before, but was that a good decision?"

Nina looked down at her little master when I brought up the errand we had been asked to complete.

Lille was troubled by Nina's and my stare but she spoke up nevertheless.

"Margrave Brainier is said to be a brave and resourceful individual."

"Hmm?"

"When we ran into the margrave's troops fighting the undead, I thought that if we abandoned them and one managed to survive and inform the margrave of our existence, he would assume that we were working with the undead..... He would become a threat to my country's people if that were to happen."

Lille had an earnest look in her eye, while Nina and I shared a look with one another.

“So, there was no hidden reason then?”

It was as Lille had said, if Margrave Brainier was as smart as he was suggested to be, then a survivor reporting that suspected Nozan allies had gotten away untouched by the undead, it wouldn't be that much of a leap in logic to assume the two forces were working together.

Nina replied to my question with a nod, but when she saw Lille puffing out her cheeks she shook her head and tried to explain herself.

“Princess, I won't belittle the logic behind your reasoning, but Margrave Brainier is a hated enemy who stole our country's land. Never show mercy to the enemy.....”

Lille shook her head in denial of Nina's statement.

“Those undead were clearly moving with purpose and under someone's control..... Their leader is still unknown, but at the very least Margrave Brainier can be crossed off the list of suspects.”

Everyone, including Nina and I, was surprised by the little girl's statement.

Ariane and Chiome had a bit of respect in their eyes as they looked at Lille.

“That's certainly a possibility..... given that it was his own troops who had been attacked, the undead probably aren't under the Margrave's control.”

“If the Margrave isn't the mastermind, then he will have to take action against the undead when he receives the reports about them. That person should be able to reveal the ones behind all of this in no time.”

Chiome had been silently listening to Lille's explanation up till now, but she suddenly turned her clear blue eyes on me.

I somehow understood the meaning behind her look and shook my head in response.

We can guess that, based on Sasuke's last words, he was turned into an undead by the Hiruku Theocracy, but we still lacked any solid evidence.

Given the religion's prominence within human society, it wasn't hard to imagine the Hiruku Theocracy holding the highest authority within this region.

It would be a dangerous for foreigners like Ariane and myself, or a beastmen like Chiome, to throw out allegations based on mere speculation.

Even if we told Lille the core of our suspicions, any actions she was able to impose would be viewed as slanderous towards the religion, especially since it had been other races that provided the information to begin with.

Religion is a tricky subject, since you could never know where fanatics might appear.

It would be rather reckless for members of a different race to reveal their true thoughts here.

In any case, there was no point considering such things now.

Neither the guardsmen nor the cavalrymen showed us any direct hostility since we were united in our mission to slay monsters, I think.

In this situation, anything that threatened that unity would only decrease our ability to fulfill Lille's request.

.....Let's just do what I can for now.

My gaze was set straight ahead as I contemplated such things.

An army of one hundred thousand undead awaited us. How desperately would the capital's populace struggle? What kind of reaction would they have upon realizing their saviors weren't humans.

".....You won't understand the risk until you roll the dice."

"What?"

When she heard my mutter, Lille gave me a strange look, so I shook my head to ease her worries.

Afterwards, we took several more breaks as we continued northwards, the sky

being dyed crimson of the cross of the trip.

Only then did the scenery start to change once more.

A vast forest spread out before our eyes.

An ancient forest filled with massive trees like Canada..... was not how you would describe the ordinary forest in front of us.

Up till now, we've only seen variants of gentle hills, plains and cultivated farmland that surrounded small villages, so I was a bit relieved to return to the forests I'd recently become accustomed to.

Did it have something to do with my flesh and blood body mimicking an elf, or has living in a forest made me homesick for such areas?

The preceding riders gave the potential obstacle no mind and charged straight towards the forest.

“Do we have to pass through this forest?”

Ariane seemed a bit puzzled by their behavior.

Shortly after entering the forest, the party dismounted and began setting up camp once they'd tied their mounts to nearby trees.

Apparently, we'd be spending the night here.

The forest was named Idoba Forest, and it extended past Salma and Nozan Kingdom's current borders.

Once we crossed to the other side of the forest tomorrow, we'd be in the Nozan Kingdom.

After Zahar explained everything to us, I dismounted from Shiden and started setting up camp with Ariane and Chiome.

Even if you called it camping, hiding from the patrols of Branier territory was our utmost priority, so cooking was out of the question and our tent was nothing more than a large canvas I'd brought along.

Everyone silently ruffled through their bags for the preserved food and called it a day after eating.

The next morning, the cavalry emerged from Idoba Forest, despite the sky being as dark as the previous night.

Lille's group followed directly after the cavalrymen and we brought up the rear again.

It'd been six days since Lille left the capital.

While the girl tried her best to show appreciation to Earl Dimo's cavalrymen and her imperial guards, flashes of irritation would surface on their faces from time to time.

It was to be expected.....

The fate of their country hung in the balance because of the whims of an eleven-year-old girl.

Not to mention that her father was the King of said country.

Even if it seemed like she was desperately trying to save her father, they had no idea if she would sacrifice her own people to do so.

In their eyes, their fear of losing their country rivaled her fear of losing her father.

While grasping Shiden's reins, a vision of Soulia appeared before me.

Towns and castles in this world had to have defensive walls built around them in case of monster attacks.

Not even an army of one hundred thousand undead could easily penetrate them.

The largest problem should be the stockpiled food and necessities.

I didn't know what kind of treatment beastmen slaves received in the capital, but it couldn't have been long before their food was cut off.

I might have been able to increase our speed by taking Lille and using transfer magic, but the obstructing darkness of late night and early mornings would

drastically shorten the distance we could travel using it.

Currently, Lille would be unwilling to wait patiently for the sun to rise before the journey could continue, and I was still reluctant to reveal transfer magic to humans.

My eyes drifted between Ariane and Chiome when it dawned on me that I had no issue revealing transfer magic to them.

Was it because of intimacy..... a sense of closeness to those close to my original race?

The sun gradually rose as my head was consumed by such thoughts.

Around noon, the cavalry broke away from the grassy plains we'd been on and started to travel along obviously man-made roads.

Eventually, a medium sized town appeared in the distance and one of the cavalymen raised the Earl's and Nozan's flags and raced ahead of the group.

Since we probably wouldn't attack a town with such small numbers, we must have already reached Nozan.

The sound of a trumpet rose from the town gate and our party was led to a nearby stable and pasture.

The dignified appearance of a dragon mount bringing up the rear caught the interest of those going in and out of town, so two guards ran parallel to us as we neared the stable.

The cavalymen and guards had already dismounted from their horses and were untying what little baggage they brought along.

"Switch horses! Be sure to check the condition of your new mount before we depart!"

Zahar stood in the center of the activity issuing out commands.

So we were stopping to exchange horses.

Their horses had been ridden over a considerable distance, and their strength and stamina should be praised for making it this far.

“Arc-dono, is your ‘mount’ alright? A horse can be arranged for you if you’d like?”

While the others were getting prepared, Zahar came up to us and glanced at Shiden before speaking up.

Shiden let out a small “Gyurriin” and scratched the ground with one of his feet in response.

He insisted that he could still go on.

“I think we’ll be alright.”

“Then we’ll leave once preparations are complete.”

Apparently satisfied by my answer, Zahar turned on his heels and started checking on some of the others.

It took about thirty minutes for the guards and cavalymen to remove their saddles from their old horses and place them on their new ones.

Once they were ready, we left the town in a hurry.

However, as we left I noticed that the number of cavalymen had increased somewhat and they flew an unknown flag.

They seemed to belong to that town’s feudal lord. Although our numbers hadn’t increased all that much, the inclusion of well-rested cavalymen did boost morale.

We continued riding north until the sun began to set.

We camped out near a small town this time, but since we were within their country, the feudal lord provided us with a warm meal.

According to Nina, we’d reach Soulia tomorrow.

The Dimo cavalry seemed excited that our destination was within reach, but the

guards that had accompanied Lille since the beginning didn't look so good.

Lille was handed a bowl of warm soup by her personal guard Nina, but the princess had a glum look on her face.

When I turned away from them, I found Ponta happily wagging her tail as she dug into her plate of freshly cooked vegetables.

“Kyun☆ Kyun☆”

“You always go at your own pace.....”

Once she'd licked the plate clean, I started scratching under her chin, while she began cleaning her fur.

A yawn leaked out as she began to drift off because of her full stomach.

“The capital shouldn't have fallen, but.....”

Chiome let out a small mutter as she looked at Ponta, causing Ariane's ears to subtly twitch.

Only the gods knew at this point.....

Chapter 22: Hidden Deformities

The next day, the sun had yet to rise.

Since our numbers had increased some what, the cavalry kicked up more dew covered blades of grass as we continued northwards.

We numbered a hundred and fifty cavalrymen

The hoof beats of so many horses kicked up quite a ruckus.

There was nary a hint of any travelers or peddlers on the road, so excluding us everything was rather quiet.

Ariane shuffled about behind me for a bit before freeing her ears from her gray cloak. Closing her eyes, she seemed to be focusing on something.

“Do you hear anything, Ariane-dono?”

“Shush!”

When I looked over my shoulder and asked her a question, Ariane put a finger to her lips and shushed me.

The highway was surrounded by a wooded area and nothing of mention could be seen.

“.....Something’s here!”

The moment Ariane opened her mouth, an unidentified creature burst out of the bush near the front of the cavalrymen.

“Aaaggghhh!!”

“Wha-What is that thing!!!”

Several cavalrymen shouted as they were knocked off of their horses by the

surprise attack, their horses following right behind them.

The enemy had appeared from blind spots in the woods as if they'd been waiting for us.

While they were humanoid in appearance, no one would ever confuse them with humans.

Bodies covered in dull, gray skin and attached to the ends of their arms were three sets of hands.

Their most notable features were the ones from their necks up.

What looked like a giant earthworm curled around their necks seemed to be entrails that had been pulled through their throats, somehow pulsating as if they were still functional.

The creature's mouth looked like an opened sea anemone was fixed in the center of their face, however, I suddenly heard the sound of bones snapping as the creature's mouth shot out at one of the pinned down cavalrymen.

“Gyhaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

The cavalry man was dragged into the thicket in his final moments.

Some of the cavalrymen avoided being knocked over by maneuvering off of the highway, but more of the humanoids monsters were ready and waiting, digging into the horse's sides the moment they entered the woods.

“Fuck! What's going on!?”

Zahar unintentionally cursed as he watched the scene unfurl before his eyes.

Since the attackers had struck the cavalrymen vanguard, Lille and her guards avoided any injury, the horses however were frozen in place by sheer terror.

The man I assumed was the leader of the cavalry shouted orders in an attempt to reestablish order, but the worm-men continued to appear one after another.

“Ariane-dono, do you know what those are?”

I asked Ariane what they were, but she calmly shook her head.

“I’ve never seen them before..... but they’re definitely undead.”

“The stench of the dead has swept into this area.....”

Ariane raised an eyebrow as she glanced over the zombie-like undead.

While Chiome grimaced after taking in a whiff of the area.

Another new form of undead has appeared.

Assuming that these undead and the spider chimeras shared the same origins, then they’d been placed here to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the capital.

The situation had continued to deteriorate while I’d been contemplating things.

“Everyone, help our allies!! Use your spears to keep your distance!”

Zahar began shouting directions at the guards behind him in the middle of this chaos. The guards took out two rods and attached them before connecting a blade to one end.

They seemed to have detachable spears.

Not even a minute had passed since Zahar’s order, yet all of them had managed to assemble their spears.

The guards brandished their spears and charged forward with hearty battle cry.

I tightened my hold on Shiden’s and prepared to act, but Zahar turned around and yelled, “Arc-dono, protect Princess Lille!” before raising his own spear and charging forward.

I brought Shiden parallel to Nana’s horse and saw that the Lille had turned pale at the sight of what was unfolding before us.

It was unavoidable, really.

Her eyes were bearing witness to true horror.

I felt a chill run down my spine as I watched a worm-man's mouth tear out a chunk of meat from another cavalryman.

“Ariane-dono, Chiome-dono.”

As I keep an eye on Lille the two of them leaped off of Shiden and drew their weapons.

“We'll leave the enemies around the capital for Arc.”

Ariane raised her slender lion-motif sword as she joked around.

Infernal Flame, reduce all that you consume to ashes

After calmly funneling her magic into fire spirits a pale flame engulfed the blade of Ariane's sword.

Ariane simultaneously took a running leap forward.

The hood of her gray cloak fell from her head as she began to engage with the worm-men.

The flames around her blade coiled like a serpent and mercilessly incinerated any worm-man they came in contact with.

Water Style: Water Shuriken!!

Spheres of water appeared above Chiome's head and transformed into shurikens once she finished her hand signs.

Through the air as Chiome launched her water shurikens at the worm-men in-between Ariane's sword swings.

The shurikens penetrated their targets with the same force of a high-powered water cutter.

“Kyun!”

Watching the two fight seemed to excite Ponta since she puffed up her tail and started to raise a gust of wind around herself, preparing to fly off—

“It’s too dangerous this time.”

I gently grabbed Ponta by the scruff of her neck and told her to behave.

Since the opponents were surprisingly quick, especially the sections above their necks, Ponta would be devoured in no time.

“Kyun.....”

Ignoring Ponta’s protest and her hind-leg’s sporadic kicking, I invoked Sword of Judgement against an approaching worm-man.

A magic formation appeared at the worm man’s feet before the sword of light penetrated it through the chest.

The worm-man’s body dissolved in a similar manner as the spider chimera, but they also left behind a putrid stench.

While the sea anemone-like organ was capable of moving very quickly, the rest of the body couldn’t keep up.

It wasn’t that much of a threat as long you attacked between movement intervals.

In fact, the guards and cavalymen managed to turn the formerly hopeless situation around by having the cavalymen distract the monsters with their swords and letting the guards use their spears to attack the monsters’ bodies.

Of course, it was thanks to Ariane’s and Chiome’s support that they’d been able to regroup so quickly.

While I’d been observed to battle from atop Shiden, a group of worm-men managed to sneak up behind us..... however, their mouths couldn’t get through the reddish scales of the dragon mount, so they were only sucking on thick hide.

Shiden was annoyed by this and knocked the worm-men down with a flick of his tail.

His tail was like a giant whip, crushing the worm-men without mercy.

“Ugh, intense.....”

When he was finished, their bodies had been reduced to lumps of ground meat.

Next to us, Nina and Lille were looking at Shiden with bulging eyes.

Dragon mounts were like living armored vehicles.

I was starting to understand why the people of Tajiento built their wall, fearing the tiger tribe.

While I indulged in such thoughts, the worm-mens' attack was brought to a swift end.

“There was nothing special about them apart from their ugly appearance.....”

Once the flames coiling around her sword died out, Ariane took a look around and shrugged her shoulders.

“Their bodies were as soft as a regular person's. It would have been rather troublesome had they wore armor like the undead soldiers in Tajiento.”

Chiome voiced her agreement to Ariane's statement while fixing her hat.

All of the cavalymen looked at them in utter amazement.

“Well, I suppose I should heal the injured.”

Once I confirmed that Lille was no longer in any danger, I began healing the men who had been injured in battle.

It's better to sell favors while you could.

Even though my motivation was steeped in self-interest, everyone showed me surprise and gratitude the moment they saw severe wounds vanish without a trace.

I'd taken off my helmet several times throughout this trek, drinking the spring water to restore my dark elf form beforehand, so they were well aware of my status as an elf.

Having their lives saved or the Hiruku doctrine..... what would you choose in this situation?

.....Hmhmhm, I quite the schemer.

As I was internally singing praises for myself, my eyes wandered into the undergrowth several cavalrymen had been dragged into.

There were those I could do little for with this level of healing.

If one of the cavalrymen's arms had been eaten, so I used healing magic to stop the bleeding and restore the flesh around damaged section of the arm.

They lost an arm, but it was still better than dying.

However, there were still people that were impossible to treat.

Even if I used my resurrection magic on them, there was nothing I could do for those who'd had large portions of their bodies devoured by the worm-men.

It was better than I didn't reveal resurrection magic in a place such as this anyway.....

In the aftermath of the attack, the death toll numbered to less than ten and only several men were crippled.

"I'm terribly sorry, Arc-dono.Would those monsters have been companions to the undead that besiege the capital?"

Once she regained her composure, Lille showed her gratitude for healing the injured.

However, I also caught her muttering something to herself.

Her anxiety was hitting her hard.

"Arc-dono, here."

Chiome suddenly came out of the thicket and held something up.

It was a bloodied medieval backpack.

There was a set of branches tied to the top of the pack, and the shoulder straps had been chewed through.

It probably belonged to someone that came here to collect firewood.

“Those who approach the capital were ambushed by those creatures.....”

Chiome had found the pack while searching for other cavalrymen.

“..... Hurry!”

I looked back to find Lille riding with Nina, whose complexion was quickly deteriorating as she grasped her horse’s reins.

When she silently nodded at me, I turned to Zahar.

Zahar nodded back and started handing out instructions to the scattered people.

“Those who can no longer fight will stay behind! Five or six of the cavalrymen will lead them back to the town from this morning! All others, prepare to set off after checking your equipment!”

“Yes!!”

Everyone began to fulfill their respective duties, separating the injured from those who would be advancing to the capital.

The smiles were wiped from the cavalrymen’s faces as they scanned the surrounding area.

Those who hurried ahead carried a silent tension as the sound of hoof beats spread through the area.

Eventually, we broke through the woods and our speed declined as the road took on a gentle incline.

They were probably just cautious of another ambush, but the cavalry leader’s horse came to a near standstill when he reached the top of the hill.

The others, not wishing to crush into him, slowed down as well.

Lille realized something was wrong as she watched their strange behavior.

“Nina! We have to hurry! The capital should be just beyond this hill!

The look on the guards' faces caused the princess to turn around and urge her to guard forward.

In accordance with her plea, Zahar ordered the cavalrymen to part ways, but the members of the princess's group simultaneously inhaled as they gazed at the scenery below.

“Shiden.”

Provoked by their strange behavior, I guided Shiden to Lille's side.

“.....What.”

One word leaked from my mouth as I viewed the same scene as they had.

Chapter 23: Heavenly Knight Arc

The road gradually descended down a hill and led to a large city in the distance.

Countless creatures squirmed around the city's outer wall in a seemingly mindless frenzy.

It was like ants swarming a large prey animal.

From here it looked like innumerable grains dotted the landscape, but considering each of those grains was an armored undead soldier, it was clearly a mistake to only bring a hundred and fifty men.

The sun was already high in the sky above, and the sunlight was reflected by the armors of the horde that surrounded Soulia.

Occasionally, you could catch flickers of humans atop the wall actively fighting against the myriad of undead

“..... Will my brothers truly be able to gather enough reinforcements to overcome such numbers?”

Lille's eyes were glued to the macabre spectacle as her utterance slipped past her lips.

“Princess, they are but a massive horde. There is no way the kingdom's soldiers would fall to a siege of this caliber.”

Nina voiced her declaration in support of Lille, the princess nodding back in return.

“That's right! until my brothers return with reinforcements, we have to do everything in our power to prevent the capital's collapse!”

When they heard the princess's powerful declaration snapped the soldiers out of the trance seeing the state of the capital placed them under.

Lille gave a satisfactory nod before glancing at Zahar waiting at her side.

“Zahar! How shall we proceed?”

Zahar remained silent for a moment before bowed on his horse and answered the princess’s question.

“.....If the monsters from before were part of the enemy’s forces there is a possibility that another ambush has been set up along the major highways. It’s necessary to eliminate them before reinforcements arrive.”

Lille nodded again after hearing Zahar’s suggestion.

“Cavalrymen, sweep away the enemies along the main highways! Imperial guards, we’ll take a detour around the highways and scout out the land.”

Zahar began discussing the layout of the capital with two imperial guards and the leader of the cavalrymen after shouting his orders.

The troop’s morale seemed to have risen in preparation for the battle at hand.

However, Chiome had kept an eye on the capital atop of Shiden, and her ears caused her hat the shift just before she spoke a strained warning.

“Whah!? The air shifted.”

I couldn’t begin to guess the meaning of her words and was about to ask what she meant, but the terrified screams originating from the capital cut me off.

The soldiers heard them too and simultaneously looked towards the capital.

A massive hole had appeared in the once sealed city gate, and the army of countless undead began to cluster around the gate.

“The southern gate has been breached!!?”

That shout seemed to carry everyone’s tension and frustration.

“This is bad.....”

Zahar mutter caused Lille’s small shoulders to tremble.

“This..... how long until my brothers arrive.....”

Her voice was but a whisper and her gray eyes remained wide open. Nina grasped on to the princess’s shoulders to calm her down.

“If something isn’t done soon, this shall be a repeat of the disaster in Tajiento.”

Chiome’s blue eyes narrowed as she calmly spoke.

The large hole in the southern gate seemed to be too small for the entirety of the undead army to flood into the capital, so many of the undead remained clustered outside the wall.

However, it was only a matter of time.

Furthermore, the other undead that had surrounded the wall seemed to be drawn to the hole made in the city gate.

I didn’t know the layout of the capital, but if there was a structure that could hinder the undead, then all wasn’t lost. If there was no such obstructing structure, then the defenders would either barricade themselves in the capital or risk fleeing from the opposite gate, it depended on the amount of rations they had available.

Zahar raised his voice in an attempt to calm the soldier while I was lost in thought.

“Be at ease, the inner wall has yet to be crossed! While the outer wall has been compromised, the capital hasn’t fallen!”

So another wall existed within the capital. It was possible for them to hold out a little longer.

While Zahar was attempting to reassure the soldiers, there wasn’t much hope in his eyes as he looked towards the capital.

“Hmm, I suppose I should take care of this.”

“Kyun?”

Ponta gave me a confused stare when she heard me muttering to myself.

“Are you serious?”

I looked over my shoulder and nodded my head in response to Ariane’s question.

“We’d be leaving here empty-handed if we simply watch the capital collapse. It might be a little flashy, but things should work out somehow.”

“Giyuriiiiin.”

Shiden roared and rocked his body like a mighty warrior when I said that.

The high-pitched roar was so incongruous to his robust appearance that it caught everyone’s attention.

“Ariane-dono, Chiome-dono please guard Princess Lille while I take care of the capital. Ariane-dono and the others might get caught up in this, so I’ll go ahead and clear the path.”

Ariane and Chiome silently lept off of Shiden when I said that.

“Arc-dono, are you going to plunge into that alone!?”

A dumbfounded Lille called out to before I set off.

While I understood the meaning behind her question, I intentionally gave her an unrelated answer.

“Don’t worry, Lille-dono. Ariane-dono and Chiome-dono are more skilled than I am and won’t hinder you or your escorts.”

Ariane let out a sigh and shrugged when I said that. Chiome simply gave me a small nodded. I grabbed Ponta by the scruff of her neck and handed her to Chiome.

“Kyun?”

Unable to grasp my intentions, Ponta gave me a confused look.

“Things will be a little hectic this time, stay here with Chiome.”

“Kyun!”

Acknowledging the circumstances, Ponta settled in Chiome’s arms before seeing me off.

When I glanced back I saw that there was a complex expression on Ariane’s face, as if there was something she wanted to say.

.....Maybe she wanted to speak with Ponta and Chiome in private.

“Then, I’m off!”

Saying only that, I pulled on Shiden’s reins and directed us towards the crowd of undead around the destroyed gate.

“Giyuriiiiiiiiiiiiin!!”

With a spirited roar, Shiden’s six legs hammered the earth as he rapidly drove headlong towards the capital.

My ears were filled with the sound of my Overcoat of the Night Sky fluttering in the wind.

Shiden was incredibly fast and it was only a matter of moments before my entire field of view was dominated by the capital filled.

I let go of the reins and drew the Holy Thunder Sword and raised the Holy Shield of Teutates .

I used the stirrups of Shiden’s saddle to stand as my fixed my gaze straight ahead.

The undead in our immediate vicinity noticed Shiden’s approach, so tens of thousands of undead turned in our direction.

“Huhahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!!!”

It might have simply been pre-battle moral, but an unexpected laughter slipped from my lips before vanishing in the wind behind us.

The next moment..... Shiden collided with the undead soldiers, his bulky

frame, six-legged speed, and two horns blowing away everything in our path.

While a dull ring sounded with every collision with the undead, there was simply too many of them.

I could also clearly see more spider-chimeras among the undead.

I continued to swing my sword from my saddle, but even though undead fell with each swing, there was no end in sight to them. Gradually, Shiden's feet began to slow against the physical wall of the undead.

"The tides seem to be turning, Shiden!"

Shiden didn't reply to my statement, instead slowly advancing down the course that led to the gate.

It was almost time.....

About half of the undead were still trying to push into the capital suddenly focused their attention on us, and began to give chase.

"Shinden, go back to Ariane and the others!"

I leapt off of Shiden's back and slapped his backside as I spoke.

"Giyuriiiiin!!"

Shiden glanced down at me for a moment before running off.

"Hmm, I guess it's time to get serious..... Heh heh."

The undead soldiers saw Shiden's departure as the perfect opportunity to brandish their weapons and rushed me.

The strange laughter continued to spew from my helmet as I saw the overwhelming force's approach.

I readied the Holy Thunder Sword and unleashed a skill on the approaching crowd.

"Flying Dragon Slash!"

A sonic boom accompanied the arc of light that flew forward.

The cluster of undead in front of me was blown away upon contact with the arc of light.

However, innumerable undead trampled over the remains of the fallen allies and continued their assault.

“Flying Dragon Slash!!”

I swung my sword once more and blow away even more undead. As a bit of insurance, I swung my sword yet again in the undead soldier’s direction.

“Flying Dragon Slash Aha haha!!”

The repeated impacts of the light arcs had decimated the entirety of the undead soldiers in front of me.

The dust clouds kicked up by my attack momentarily obscured my vision, allowing a large shadow leap at me.

The deformed figure wielded two shields and brandished two swords. My strange laughter continued as spider-chimera swung its swords down..... only for my shield to block one blow and my sword to parry the other. There was no way such a simplistic charge could compare to Glenys’ and Ariane’s swordsmanship.

“Shield Bash!”

My shield gave off a slight glow and I hammered it into the spider chimera’s center mass..... the monster agonized expression was the last thing I saw before it was blown away.

“I don’t have the time to play around with you lot.....”

When I noticed that the scattered upper bodies of the undead began to move, I lowered my sword to the ground and casually destroyed them.

“Flame Viper”

When I invoked the spell, a circle of flames appeared at my feet. It erupted into a pillar fire in the shape of a snake, which proceeded to slither around and incinerate everything in my vicinity.

When a spider chimera charged towards the serpent, it coiled itself around it, quickly consuming the monster in a pillar of flame.

The lump of charcoal that remained was knocked over by a light breeze.

Looking around I saw that a large circle had opened up around me where the enemy had once stood.

I'd defeated a considerable number of undead, but this was just the tip of the iceberg.

..... I should have bought enough time to use it.

I took a deep breath and stared straight ahead.

The undead soldiers were immune to fear, so they undauntedly closed the space created by my last attack.

"I never thought that the chance to use this would come so soon, but I can finally unleash my full power."

I stuck my sword into the ground and began to chant.

"Come! Heavenly Warrior! Let us show them the power of a heavenly knight!!"

My spell was invoked as I spoke.

The steady flow of mana flowing out of my body couldn't be compared to that of any spell I had cast so far.

An enormous magic formation spread out from the center of my feet.

"I open Heaven's Doors and summon you! Executioner Michael!"

Vermillion golden flames exploded from the huge magic formation.

The circular design of the magic formation rose into the heavens.

A huge pillar of light encompassed the plains surrounding Soulia.

When the light settled, the magic formation was copied onto the sky..... and when the vermillion, golden flames reignited a hymn began to fill the whole area.

A large jet of fire shot out of the formation in the sky, with a single humanoid figure silently emerging from its center.

I couldn't accurately grasp its size while it floated in the sky, but it appeared to match the five-meter height of Storm King Seteka.

Its body was covered in a vermillion gold set of armor, in its left hand it carried a shield that resembled feathers, in its right it wielded a crimson-bladed extravagantly designed sword.

Beneath the half-helmet that covered its head was a pair of seductive female lips.

Long crimson hair flowed from under her helm and was gently caressed by the wind, the tips of each strained ending in a small flame.

On the beings back sit three pairs of massive beautiful wings, the feathers that fill with a single flap of those wings instantaneously reduced the undead they touched to light particles.

One of the four heavenly knight skills, Blazing Seraphim of Judgement:
Executioner Michael



“.....!?”

I held my breath as I took in its figure. That overwhelming holy aura..... that oppressive presence, and worst of all, the very form of the angel, I was made aware of it all.

The angel who appeared in the game didn't wear such pompous armor, nor had its face been hidden by a helmet

It was as if a goddess had descended on the battlefield.

However, one thing was for certain this existence was not the one I had been expecting.

(.....What does this mean??)

The angel began to act as that thought crossed my mind.

It spoke in a song like voice..... that... “something” of overwhelming information fell to the ground like a crush of angry waves, sending ripples throughout the area.

With only that, the undead around me were turned into particles of light before vanishing. All creatures within three hundred meters of me had stopped existing.

The angel began to move as I stood there dumbfounded. It's figure gradually started to shrink as it descended towards me.

Though its appearance was different, it behaved in the same way as it did in the game, meaning we were entering the next phase.

However, an intense shock suddenly ran through my body.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaghhhhhhhhhhh!!!”

Something enormous penetrated my very being, unpleasantness seeped into me as the unknown existence rewrote my essence from the inside..... my whole body felt as if an entire layer of myself had been shaved off.

This was the result of the heavenly knight's unique skills.

All four of the skills caused an angel to descend from the heavens and infuse its user with heaven's power..... according to the footnotes, they were summons that created new skills.

Even a max level player like myself had to consume a third of their mana pool to use it, there was a five-minute limit, and each skill had a twelve hour cooldown making them the definition of inefficient.....

I never imagined that the act of absorbing such an existence into myself would feel like such a violation of my being.

I could say that without uncertainty. It wasn't a demerit that this skill had a limited duration of five minutes..... I doubted my mind and body could hold out for much longer than that. Even once the half a day cooldown passed, I had no desire to ever use it again.

The angel stopped shrinking once it was two meters large, and proceeded to float behind me like the spirit it actually was.

“Gyuaaaaaaaaa!!”

In this state, I had to lean on my sword to keep standing.

However, with each staggered breath I took, I felt the power I'd obtained coursing through my veins..... While struggling to control the being flowing through my body I looked forward.

In this advent mode, heavenly knights could only utilize the authorities of the angel they were currently bonded with.

In the game, each authority was considered a weapon of mass destruction.

The undead had recognized me as a threat some time ago and were beginning to gather in the area I cleared away.

Dance of Fiery Destruction: Autumn Flame Rondo

One of Michael's usable authorities..... when I invoked it my body began to

move on its own, Michael mirroring my exact movements behind me.

Like a dance, my body rotated and moved to an unheard rhythm..... my body emitted a vermillion flame and trails of fire shot off in the direction of every step.

As I danced, the flames continued to grow and devour everything in their path.

Any undead that so much as approached the wave of flames was instantaneously reduced to dust.

A maiden gracefully dancing in a field of flames..... if you only watched Michael behind me, you'd be treated to such a mesmerizing sight.

However, there was a knight adorned in armor mimicking her movements in front of her.

I wonder how it must have appeared to the bystanders.

I felt more of myself being shaved away as I focused on that thought for too long.

The first authority came to an end with an area clearing twirl.

It was only a rough estimate, but I'd say this last attack had managed to decrease the undead by about ten thousand troops. However, my mind couldn't afford to revel in that victory for long. The plains were still filled to the brim with the undead. But I managed to close the distance between me and the damaged gate.

..... I would use this momentum to kill as many undead as possible.

Roar of the Celestial Phoenix: Caelum Phoenix Pieratto*

A heavenly, chorus-like female's voice and my own mixed with one another as I invoked another authority.

The woman's voice probably belonged to Michael..... it was a solemn voice that simultaneously exhibited majesty and sanctity, even as my body began to rise off the ground.

My body began moving on its own again, my arms stretching to their utmost limit and my head craning upwards, it must have looked like I was praising the heavens as flame wings appeared at my back, which subsequently began throwing feathers into the air once they started flapping.

I floated around the area as the wings continued to flap on their own, whatever the flame feathers touched burnt to ash upon contact, their destruction sending, even more, feathers into the air.

They were literally reducing everything to ash, the trampled crop fields flared up and vanished, only piles of dust remained in areas once filled with undead.

This authority had a long active time and half of the undead besieging the capital had been turned into the ash that was blanketing the area.

About half of my time limit on the Heavenly Knight skill had expired.

I wanted to wipe away the last of them but my mind and body were reaching their limit.

I clenched my teeth and prayed for the timer to expire soon.

Executioner's Crimson Sword of Fire: Rubrum Flamma*

When my feet finally returned to the ground the authority I invoked caused my body to thrust my now crimson and enormous flame-coated sword forward.

At first glance it resembled the spirit magic Ariane favored, but its power was on a whole other dimension.

When I swung the crimson flame-coated sword, the flames extended forward like a whip with a mind of its own and blew away all the undead I targeted.

Furthermore, the power was so intense that the whip-like crimson flames gouged out the ground it touched, everything in its path vanishing.

Every slight adjustment of the sword resulted in more undead vanishing and the topography being rewritten as if a disaster had struck.

The crimson flames accidentally scraped away part of the city wall and a portion

of the gate when my control slipped for but a moment.

It was a good thing the undead had gathered there vanished along with it.

Once the authority finally ended, I was able to take a breath and count the undead that remained around the capital.

I came up short in the end, but it should be simple to clean up the remnants of their forces. I don't know how many managed to make it through the gate, but if I tried to invoke an authority inside the city, it would be wiped off the map.

A sigh slipped from my lips as I looked back.

The time limit of the skill had finally arrived, Michael was slowly sucked back up into the magic formation in the sky before the formation itself faded out of existence.

I stuck my sword in the ground once more and knelled over.

“..... That was quite difficult. I don't think I can bring myself to use it again.”

I voiced my complaint to no one in particular as I looked into Soulia's heavily damaged gate and sighed.

*Translator Noted: The superscript of the Heavenly Knight's Authorities translate to latin. Namorax and I don't know the language and stopped trying to translate it after the first one. The authority names in the chapter are a combination of the superscript and kanji translations as a result.

Epilogue

The Branier territory of the Salma Kingdom.

In the study, the one in the feudal lord's castle..... an elderly man sat at his large desk in the center of the room.

A sharp light could be seen in his eyes as he stroked his gray mustache and glanced over documents as he rested his large body in his chaise chair.

His name was Margrave Wendelin De Branier.

Although he was a prominent member of Salma Kingdom's aristocracy, he rarely showed his face in the capital as the capital's nobles held a grudge against his family, and he found dealing with them rather troublesome.

His territory had a surplus of soldiers since they were necessary to deal with the occasional skirmish or routine monster subjugation.

Thanks to the regular military patrols, the relatively rich Branier territory was a safe haven of sorts. The taxes collected through the region were fed back into the standing army, which in turn allowed the region to continue prospering.

This, however, didn't mean extensive problems no longer occurred. When disasters spread, the territory's profit fell, which meant that the maintenance of the standing army would be heavily affected as well.

Therefore, Margrave Branier personally read the reports of every worrisome occurrence within his territory, hoping to find a clue that would let him settle any issue quickly and precisely.

He was currently waiting for a report to come on a recent worrisome issue, but "waiting" was an activity he never enjoyed, and the time in-between action was painful for him.

It was under such conditions that his female assistant entered the study after being granted permission to do so.

She stepped forward and bowed towards Margrave Branier, he was the first to speak as he gestured for her stop with the unnecessary formalities.

“So, have the whereabouts of the mysterious official been discovered?”

The women immediately nodded at the Margrave’s question.

“Perhaps. However, today’s report deals with the deformed monsters mentioned previously. Of the six platoons which were sent to search the other day, the second suffered heavy casualties, the third suffered minimal losses, and the fifth was half destroyed. Here is the complete list of casualties.”

“What!?”

The woman gave her report in an indifferent tone before a flushed Margrave Branier snatched the list from her hands and started examining it.

“According to the reports, there were four deformed monsters in total. Even though all four of them were slain, the inexperience fighting the enemy led to the heavy casualties.”

“Four!? There were four of these abominations scurrying around my territory!?”

Margrave Branier unintentionally looked away from the list and focused on the woman before him.

His expression was becoming harsher and harsher while the woman, being used to this, nodded along and continued to read out the document in her hand.

“In related news, an unknown armed force appeared as the fifth platoon were combating two of the deformed monsters. Here is a summary of their armament and numbers.....”

The assistant pulled out another document and handed it to Margrave Branier.

The Margrave scowled as he snatched it from her and began to read it.

“Approximately one hundred cavalymen..... in addition to a knight and two women riding a mysterious monster.....?”

The Margrave became puzzled as he looked over the document's contents again and again.

The mysterious knight and female duo assisted the fifth platoon in battle..... but the participation of the cavalry isn't mentioned."

The woman agreed with the Margrave as he began to groan while reading the document.

"That is correct. The fifth platoon managed to avoid being annihilated thanks to the assistance of the mysterious knight. The man faced an enemy capable of decimating a platoon and won."

The Margrave calmly nodded after hearing her assumption.

"They were northward bound, huh..... The cavalry probably belongs to Earl Dimo. The Knight was probably a mercenary, but something about this bothers me....."

Margrave Branier stood up and walked over to a map that hung on the wall as he spoke. He stroked his mustache as he glared at the map.

"The first slain group of guards was found here, and the witnesses first reported sighting the group..... here. Then....."

While the Margrave mapped out the locations to himself, the attendant looked at the map as well.

It was only after he'd gathered all his thoughts that the margrave turned to her again.

"Perhaps something has happened in Nozan..... I don't know what exactly, but something has happened. The group was chased by the deformed monsters, but then obtained reinforcements and returned to the kingdom. Yet, they didn't simply leave the platoon to their fate when they encountered them....."

The Margrave stroked his chin after speaking up.

"Hmph, send a messenger to Nozan's capital! Ensure that the number of guards doesn't warrant an attack and prioritize speed above all else! I will head towards

Larisa myself.”

The woman skillfully made a memo of the instructions that had been given in rapid succession.

“Hurry, this can’t wait..... I have a bad feeling about this!”

The attendant bowed towards the margrave and immediately left the room.

Margrave Branier listened to the door closing behind him before returning to his work desk..... his eyes scanned over the pile of the documents before picking the one he’d been looking for.

The content of the report was a description of a mysterious monster that had been sighted entering the Rouen Forest across the Uiru river. The witness had been a long distance away and it had been dusk when they saw it, but they reported the monster having four arms.

“Fuck, why didn’t I remember this at the start! What’s going on in this region..... what’s happening in that capital?”

The Margrave scowled as crumpled the parchment and tossed it at the map in an attempt to vent his anger.



Four countries occupied the southwestern region of the Northern Continent, two of which shared a border with all other countries.

One was the Nozan Kingdom, the other was the Hiruku Theocracy.

Of all the human countries that existed on the Northern Continent, Hiruku held the greatest influence thanks to being the center of the Hiruku religion..... The theocracy’s capital sat at the base of Mt. Arthus, which housed a massive mithril mine, and shared another border with the Great Leburan Empire.

Halfway up the mountain, in the center of large, manmade overlook stood a massive white cathedral.

It was the Arthus Central Cathedral.

The cathedral acted as Pope Thanatos Shirubiwes Hiruku's main residence.

The building was like a piece of art in it of itself, with white marble floors polished to a mirror shine, impressively tall walls and the religious story depicted on the ceiling's mural one had to crane their neck to see.

In the depths of such a gorgeous sanctuary was a small room where not even the most saintly of believers were allowed to enter, even the cardinals rarely set foot in this room.

The interior of the room was expertly decorated, but it lacked the excess and splendor of the rest of the cathedral, giving it the atmosphere of a high-class inn.

Two unmoving soldiers clad in ornamental armor were stationed at the room's door, the only eye-catching feature of the seemingly ordinary room.

One man calmly sat in a reclining chair inside the room as he casually looked over the reports stacked on his desk.

However, the most striking thing about this scene was the man himself.

His body was adorned in luxurious robes and he wore a mitre embedded with holy symbols of the Hiruku religion.

However, the veil attached the mitre covered the man's head, and made it impossible to see his true face.

It was none other than Pope Thanatos Shirubiwes Hiruku.

A hand extended from the robes sleeve..... the gloved hand felt the smooth texture of the parchment through the silken fabric as he picked one document out of the pile and glanced over it.

The contents of the document focused on the invasion of Delfuento's capital by one of his cardinals, Pope Thanatos merrily enjoyed the pleasure the reading delivered.

"So, Delfrent's capital has fallen.....Yet, their forces contained nothing but Ghost Knights and Undead soldiers..... To think I once thought having Ghost Knight present would save any issue, I was clearly mistaken back then. Hahaha."

Pope Thanatos chuckled and shrugged as he spoke.

The Pope's laughter had been the only sound within the room, but it wasn't long before he settled down.

"..... Assuming that a force of that level won't be a match for the Eastern Empire, I should probably come up with something 'new', hmm. I can afford to be a little bit more relaxed in dealing with the Western Empire."

Pope Thanatos began to stroke his chin beneath the veil as he began to sort through his options.

"The heavyweight undead can easily break through thick walls. Or maybe some explosive types. No, I still lack the materials for the explosion line of undead. Those skilled at scaling walls, perhaps."

Voicing his ideas to himself, agreeing with them, then rejecting them before moving on to the next thought..... this process repeated itself over and over again.

His eyes suddenly focused on a thicker stack of documents and he proceeded to pick it up.

He casually flipped through the document before stopping on a specific page.

A smile worked its way onto Pope Thanatos' face beneath his veil.

"The Silver Knight who defeated Cardinal Charos on the Southern Continent..... He seems fun, maybe I should send someone there to rebuild the foothold..... no, I can't be too hasty when crossing the sea. One step at a time. Hahaha."

Thanatos rose from his chair and took hold of another symbol of his power, the Pope's decorative staff, and triumphantly left the room.

He laughed once more as he closed the room's door..... it was the only sound that echoed in the room.